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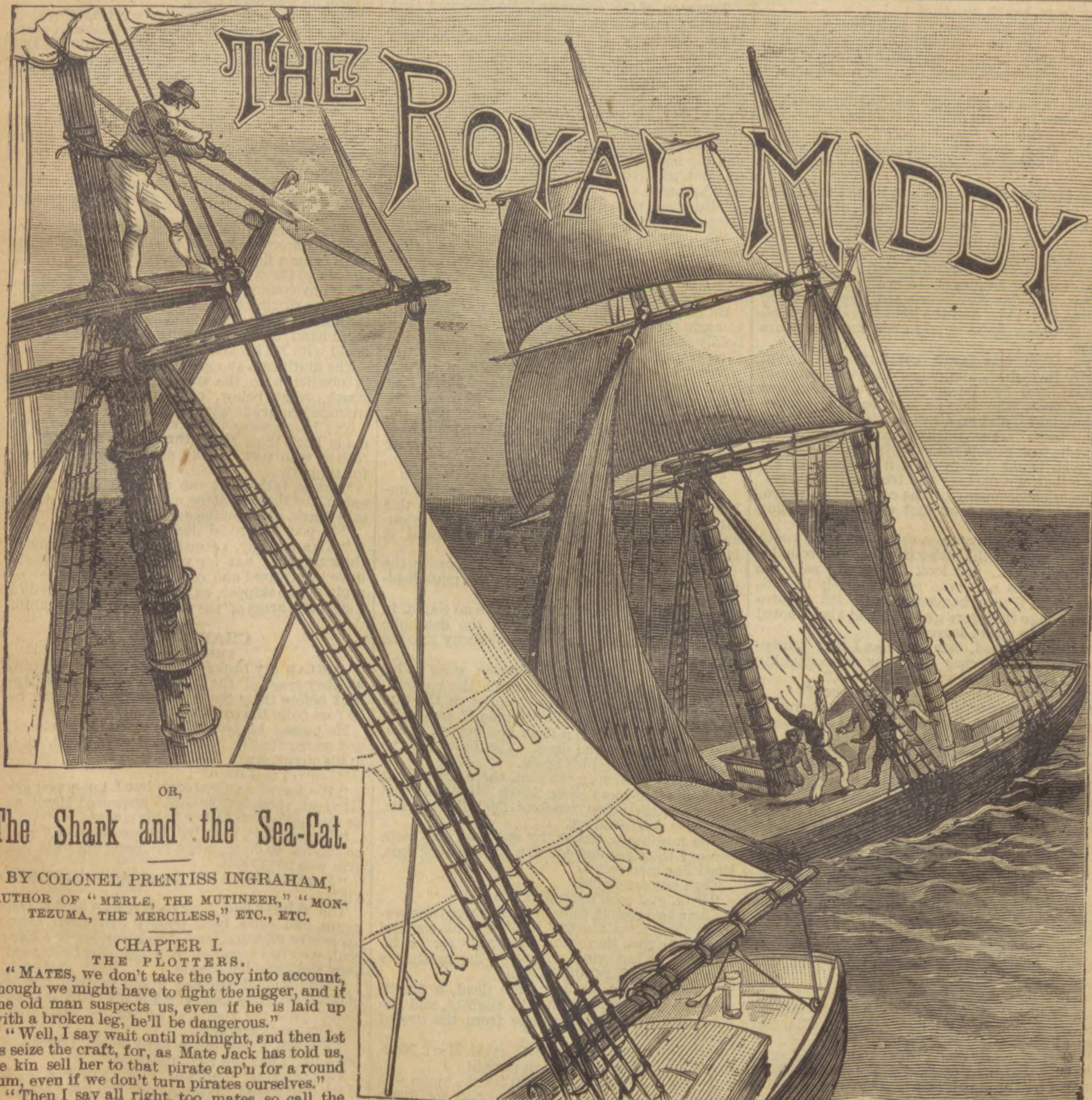
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OR,
The Shark and the Sea-Cat.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE PLOTTERS.

"MATES, we don't take the boy into account, though we might have to fight the nigger, and if the old man suspects us, even if he is laid up with a broken leg, he'll be dangerous."

"Well, I say wait until midnight, and then let us seize the craft, for, as Mate Jack has told us, he kin sell her to that pirate cap'n for a round sum, even if we don't turn pirates ourselves."

"Then I say all right, too, mates, so call the time for seizing the schooner, and I'll be on hand."

WITH A FLASH OF HIS RIFLE, A PIRATE FELL DEAD, AND A CRY OF TERROR AROSE FROM HIS OUTLAW COMRADES.

"Count me another."

"And me."

"I'm with you, mates."

The above conversation was held on board a schooner that lay becalmed at sea. Not a breath of air stirred the waters, and the atmosphere was oppressive, as the craft rose and fell lazily upon the swell of the ocean.

The plotters were the crew of the vessel, and they lolled near the caboose, as they talked, and did not see a crouching form listening to their every word.

As they decided upon their lawless act, this spy crept away, and, unperceived, gained the cabin, carrying his stout shoes, which he had taken off, in his hand.

The schooner was one of those trim-built craft of a hundred tons, for which the seaports of New England were famous for building a hundred years ago.

That she was fleet, her model showed, while her tall masts were capable of spreading a vast amount of canvas.

It was several years prior to the breaking out of the Revolutionary War, and the schooner was one of the coasters plying between the New England ports and the West Indies. She was just returning with a cargo, and bound to Portland, when she was becalmed some fifty miles away from her destination.

Her voyage had been an unfortunate one, in some respects, for the yellow fever had carried off several of her crew, and she had been forced to ship new men in the West Indies, and a hard lot they were.

Then, in a gale a terrific sea had boarded the craft some ten days prior to the time when she is presented to the reader's notice, and her skipper had been dashed against the bulwarks with such force that his leg was broken above the knee.

The broken leg was set as well as it was possible by those who knew nothing about such things, and the schooner continued on her course under her mate, the very man who was to lead the mutiny and seize the vessel, and who had laid his plans carefully until at last he decided upon the seizure of the pretty craft.

The one who had overheard their plotting entered the cabin, and the light therein revealed that he was a boy scarcely over sixteen years of age.

The cabin was large, comfortably, though plainly furnished, and, when the youth entered it, contained two occupants, one of whom was the skipper, who lay upon a bed, his broken leg bandaged, and an air of anxiety resting upon his face. He was a handsome man of fifty, with the look of one who had been well reared, and who could occupy well a position in life above that of a captain of a trading schooner.

The other occupant of the cabin was a negro, who lay upon the floor fast asleep and snoring vigorously.

The latter however awoke as the youth entered, and yet the latter had made no sound.

"Well, Mark, you look disturbed," said the skipper to his son, who was strangely like his father, and a very handsome lad, with a form and carriage that were graceful and also denoted strength in a great degree.

"I am disturbed, father, for as I told you before that I suspected the crew were making trouble for us, I now am certain of it."

"You have made some discovery then?"

"Yes, I overheard their plot, and it was to seize the schooner to-night, and the mate is at the head of it."

"And the crew are all with him?"

"To a man, sir."

"I am sorry I did not let you act as mate, for you are fully capable of it, Mark."

"I think I could have taken the schooner to port, sir, even after you were disabled; but let me tell you what I heard.

"I was in the caboose when the mate called the crew about him, and told them of his plan.

"It seems that he knows some pirate captain that saw this schooner and wanted her, and the mate shipped on board, with several of his men, just to seize her.

"They did not win the three men over that we had until to-night, and now the seven are determined to seize the schooner.

"They did not take me into account, they said, though they thought you might be dangerous, even wounded as you are, and Charcoal they also feared."

"They fear me more, afore I done wid em," said Charcoal, who was the negro that had been aroused by the youth entering the cabin, and a splendid specimen of manhood he was, tall, broad shouldered, muscular and with a face devoid of fear.

"Well, my son, we must fight them, said the skipper firmly.

"Of course, father, and it shall be done right here, for I will load your weapons for you, and then there is a cutlass apiece for Charcoal and myself, and a musket and a pistol for each of us.

"When they enter you will fire, and then Charcoal and myself will come out of the state-room and drive them on deck."

"It is our only plan, and they will not expect an attack, and the surprise will be half the battle, so load the weapons, Mark, and remember that you are the commander in this affair, for I am next to useless."

"Dem men is gwine ter git hurted, dey is, and it serves em right," said Charcoal, as he sat down quietly and began to look to the loading of his musket and pistol; and he added after finishing his task:

"I guesses I gits de whetstone and sharpens up the cutlasses, for dey sha'n't be no play fight in dis business, Marse Mark."

Ten minutes after the three occupants of the cabin were ready for the mutineers, and sat in silence awaiting the hour for the uprising.

CHAPTER II.

THE MUTINY.

THE men of the schooner little dreamed that their plot was known; but, from the very first, Mark Montague had surprised them, as their faces belied them if they were honest.

There were but two pistols among the seven men, but all had knives, and they did not consider for an instant that the skipper, with his broken leg, his son, a mere boy, and a negro, could offer any resistance against their force.

"Remember, mates, we must kill the skipper and the boy, for we want no witnesses to turn up; but, as to the nigger, we will spare him, if he'll join us."

"Suppose we call him out and ask him," suggested one of the men.

"No, for if he didn't join us, he'd tell the cap'n, or we'd have to kill him now, and that would make a row, and if the skipper got wind of what we was about, he would be a dangerous man, wounded though he is."

So they decided to wait until the time for them to begin their mutinous work, and then to march boldly into the cabin in force, and attack the skipper and his son, killing them both.

"Marse, don't show no mercy to dem vill'ins, suah, for dey is to kill you and Marse Mark, and spar' me, ef I jines 'em. I jist heerd what dey said," announced Charcoal, coming into the cabin from forward, where he had made his way to the steerage and gotten near enough to hear the conversation of the scoundrels.

The calm still continued, and the mate said:

"We'll have no wind until sunrise, mates, unless it comes on to blow a hurricane, which this air feels like, so we will seize the schooner sooner, and be ready for the tempest should it come."

When they felt that all were asleep in the cabin, they moved aft in a body, the mate leading.

They took off their shoes to make no sound, in the silence that was upon all in the deathlike calm, and descended the companionway into the cabin.

The mate waited until his men were at his back, and ready for the rush upon the captain, who seemed to be calmly sleeping in the dim light, and then the word of command was upon the leader's lips, when a flash and report came, and the mate dropped dead. The bullet of the skipper had pierced his brain.

Instantly following the shot, there dashed out from a state-room door Mark Montague and Charcoal; their two muskets flashed together, and with deadly effect.

The mutineers, taken by surprise, and with three of their number down in an instant of time, stood like men dazed.

Then one called out:

"Fire, and rush upon them, lads!"

Their two pistols were fired, but were answered by shots from Skipper Montague, his son and Charcoal; then there was a struggle for an instant, and a hurrying of feet, as the mutineers rushed pell-mell out of the cabin.

Three of their number were dead, a fourth was seriously wounded, a fifth slightly, and the other two were glad to escape from the fire of the defenders.

"Follow them, Charcoal!" cried Mark Montague, and he bounded on in pursuit.

Seeing him come upon deck, for the moon was shining brightly, the mutineers cried for quarter.

"Into the hold, mutineers, or I show you no

mercy!" cried the boy, advancing upon the men with his cutlass drawn.

The mutineers were armed only with their knives, for they had fired off their pistols and had no time to reload them, while two of their number were wounded, one so seriously that he had sunk upon the deck, unable to stand.

But they saw that the youth was alone, and believing that the negro had been killed, and knowing that the skipper was unable to move from his couch, they felt that it was yet possible to seize the vessel.

All they needed was a leader, and one quickly presented himself in the person of an evil-faced Spaniard.

"Kill the boy, mates, and the schooner is ours! Now, upon him with your knives!" shouted the Spanish mutineer.

Mark Montague saw his danger. His pistol was not loaded, and three of the mutineers were now advancing upon him with knives drawn.

He could retreat to the cabin and fight it out there, but he remembered to have seen Charcoal stagger at the fire upon them, and he believed that he was dead or too seriously wounded to come to his aid; so he made up his mind to fight there.

Where the mutineers had expected to see the boy fly before them they were mistaken, for like a flash he was upon them.

"Have at you, then, you wretches!" cried Mark, as he sprung to meet his foes, and with one sweeping blow of his cutlass brought the Spaniard to the deck, and then leaped backward, and placing his back against the bulwarks, he stood at bay.

"He is but a boy, mates!" cried another self-appointed leader, "and we'll soon finish him!"

"Will you join us, Master Mark, if we spare your life?" asked the man, willing to compromise.

"No, but I will end this trouble right now!" cried Mark, and he rushed upon the three who confronted him.

They broke before this attack and seizing captain bars were preparing to rush upon him when there came a flash and a report from aft, and one of the three went down.

"I am coming to your aid, my brave boy," cried the ringing voice of the skipper, and using the musket he had just fired as a crutch, and pistol in hand, he came along the deck as well as he could with his broken leg.

The mutineers at once cried for quarter, and, in obedience to the stern order of the brave youth, went below, carrying their seriously-wounded comrade with them.

The hatch was at once closed over them, and made fast; then Mark turned to the aid of his father, who was leaning against the bulwarks for support.

"Come, father, let me aid you back to the cabin, for there will be no more trouble now," said Mark, and then he asked:

"Is poor Charcoal dead, sir?"

"Alas, my boy, I fear he is, for he fell under their fire, and but for you the schooner would have been seized and our lives ended," was the reply of the skipper, as he was almost carried in the strong arms of the youth back to the cabin.

CHAPTER III.

THE WRECK.

A GLAD cry broke from both father and son, as they reached the cabin, to see suddenly appear before them the tall form of the negro, as he rose from the cabin floor.

He passed his hand slowly over his forehead, and seeing that it was stained with blood, said, in his quaint way:

"Lordy! is I dead?"

"We feared so, Charcoal, but I guess you are all right, though wounded," answered Mark, as he was aiding his father to his couch.

"I guess I is, sah; but let me help yer," and he started to do so, when he found that his left arm was powerless.

"Lordy! I is hit two times, but I hain't dead yet."

The skipper had now been placed in his bed again, and sunk back utterly exhausted, after his severe exertion, and Mark turned to Charcoal, who had tottered to a seat, for he seemed very weak and half-dazed.

"This wound stunned you, Charcoal, for it glanced on your head, but I don't think it is serious," said the youth, as he felt the wound on the forehead carefully.

"No, sah, I has got a hard head, I reckon; but I don't like not usin' this arm."

The wounded arm was now examined, and Mark discovered that the bone was not broken, but the bullet had passed through the flesh above the elbow.

It had touched the bone, and the shock had temporarily benumbed it, but no veins were severed, and the youth quickly, and with considerable skill dressed both wounds.

"Whar is the t'other ones, sah?" asked Charcoal, who began to feel all right again, and he pointed to the three dead mutineers.

"Two are dead on deck, and one of the others is wounded, Charcoal."

"Then thar is no danger, sah; but I'm sorry I couldn't help you more, Marse Mark."

"You did your duty nobly, Charcoal, and father came to my aid on deck; but let us see if we can get these bodies out of the cabin."

Charcoal quietly stooped, and seizing one of the bodies with one hand, dragged it up the companionway, Mark following with another.

"You haven't lost any of your great strength, Charcoal," said the skipper, as the negro came back and grasped hold of the third body.

"No, sah, I'm all right. But shall I kill the rest of them bad sailor-mans, sah?"

"No, Charcoal, for we can manage them now, and we will need help to manage the schooner, for it feels to me like a storm was rising—hark!"

As the skipper spoke, Mark called down the companionway:

"Ho, Charcoal, can you help me on deck, for we are going to have a blow?"

"Ah! that I should be so crippled!" groaned the skipper, as the negro went on deck.

As he glanced about him, Charcoal said:

"Lordy! dis looks mighty bad!"

And it did, for the whole skies were now overcast, and coming down upon the schooner was a mass of inky clouds that were driving the sea before them in a wall of foam.

"It is a fearful tempest, Charcoal, and those men must help us, or we go to the bottom," and running forward, Mark threw open the hatch and called out:

"Come on deck, would you save your lives?"

"I can help, Master Mark, but my mate here can do but little, for you hit him hard," said one of the two men.

"He deserved what he got. But this is no time to talk, for Charcoal is also wounded, and we must get the schooner ready to meet the storm."

But, work as they would, the tempest was upon them ere all was shipshape to meet it, and the schooner was seized by the fierce winds and tossed by the wild waters, until Mark Montague felt all was lost.

But, with loud reports, her masts snapped off, the bowsprit followed, and the vessel righted, while the wreckage was torn from the schooner and hurled away off in the darkness on the wings of the tempest.

"Charcoal! Charcoal! where are you?" shouted Mark, for in the blinding spray nothing could be seen.

"Here, sah!" came the answer from near-by.

"And the others?"

"I'm here, Master Mark, but my wounded mate is gone," said the seaman, the last of the mutineers.

For a long time they clung to the bulwarks, unable to release their hold, and then Mark made his way to the cabin.

"Thank God! you are safe," cried the skipper, as the youth appeared before him.

"Yes, father, and Charcoal is also safe, along with the last one of the crew; but I fear the schooner is leaking badly, sir, and we will have to take to the life-boat."

"Ah, my noble boy, you are destined to be a great sailor some day, for you know that death stares us in the face, and yet you are perfectly cool."

"Well, Mark, I am in your hands, and you know what is best and will do it."

The youth then left the cabin and sounding the pumps it was found that the schooner was indeed leaking badly and could not be kept afloat many hours.

The tempest had come from off-shore, and the wreck had been driven many leagues before it out to sea.

But Mark Montague did not despair, and he went to work to get the life-boat ready.

It hung at the stern davits and was not injured, where the quarter-boats had been torn away or damaged beyond repairs by the fury of the waves.

Into the life-boat were placed some boards, and a comfortable place made for the captain, for bedding was plenty.

Then water and provisions, a compass and a mast and sail with oars, anchor, and the valuables of the vessel were put in and stowed away.

Among the last things put in was a bag of gold, of considerable value, sent by a West

Indian merchant to his family in Portland, and Mark saw the eyes of Dent, the remaining sailor, glitter with avarice as they fell upon it, and he came to the conclusion that the man would bear watching, if he was all alone.

The winds had now died away, and the sea was fast running down, so that Mark decided to leave the wreck, which was rapidly sinking.

It was just at sunrise, when the seaman and the youth brought the skipper on deck and placed him in the life-boat, and the others soon followed.

Then the boat was lowered quickly and pushed off, and just in time, for both Mark and Dent sprung to the oars and pulled for their lives as they beheld the wreck give a sudden lurch.

As it was the schooner sunk immediately, and the life-boat was nearly drawn into the whirlpool made by her going down.

"A moment more and our lives would have ended there. Now we are now adrift upon the sea," said the skipper, calmly.

"Yes, father, but the life-boat is stanch and we will soon reach land," was the cheery response of Mark Montague.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST OF THE MUTINEERS.

ONCE the life-boat was alone upon the waters, Mark Montague took his bearings, and stepping the little mast, raised the small leg-of-mutton sail and headed shoreward.

The skipper thought that they were a hundred miles fully off-shore, and with the wind fair would reach land within thirty-six hours, and at a point not very far from Portland.

So Mark headed for the land, and Charcoal, whose wounded arm prevented him from doing other work, insisted upon steering, so the tiller was yielded to him.

Carl Dent, the seaman had tried to be communicative; but he found his efforts in that respect were not encouraged.

The skipper answered him abruptly, and Mark at last said:

"Dent, the least you can say to attract attention to yourself, the better, for I have not forgotten your having been very earnest as a mutineer awhile since."

"I was forced to do what I did, Master Mark," responded the man.

"No, you were not, for you could have sided with me when you saw that I needed your aid; but you did not."

"For your efforts to save the schooner, and your assistance since, I will not give you up as a mutineer, as I should do, on reaching port, but let you go your way."

"But beware to give us no cause to change our intention in this respect."

"I'm going to do my duty, sir, as you may direct," the man said with some respect.

"Then begin by handing over the gold you took from the kits of your shipmates," said Mark:

"I haven't got—"

"See here, Carl Dent, Charcoal saw you break open and rob each kit, and you got considerable gold, which you now have in a waist-coat under your shirt."

"It does not belong to you, but to my father, for those men were mutineers on his vessel, and he has lost his ship by their mutiny."

"Off with that waist-coat, Dent."

"Some of it's mine, and you wouldn't rob me of that, would you?"

"When you came on board the schooner, I gave you an English sovereign to spend, as you had nothing, you told me, and wished to go ashore in our last port."

"So all but that sovereign, and two others, which you shall have, you must give up."

"Your father don't say so."

"I say that my son is in command, Dent!"

"He is skipper now, and you must obey him."

"You'll ruin me."

"No, for you will be four sovereigns better off than when you shipped on board the schooner, and in a port where you can easily get a berth."

The man muttered an oath, but threw open his knit shirt and handed over quite a sum in gold, taken from various pockets in the waist-coat, which he had put on.

Mark gave him back four sovereigns, but he was sure that the man had not given up all, though he did not press him.

The willingness with which the seaman seemed to yield, made him appear in a more suspicious light to Mark, who at once felt that he had made up his mind to some plot to get rid of them all in the boat, so that he should have the gold and valuables.

It was the second night after leaving the wreck, that land was sighted, and glad were the hearts of those in the life-boat.

The position of the skipper had been most cramped and painful, and tossed about as the boat was, he could not but suffer great pain, yet not a murmur came from his lips, and Charcoal also was uncomplaining.

Their food had been scant, of dry bread and smoked meat, with a little water, and therefore with hope of life ahead they were naturally elated.

The wind was blowing fresh, and the sea was running high, so Mark dared not attempt to run in until daylight, and so dropped anchor a quarter of a mile off-shore, so that all could get a good sleep, as they had had but little rest.

The seaman, Carl Dent, took his place forward, alone, Charcoal being amidships, and the skipper and Mark aft.

Thus three of them went to sleep.

The fourth did not, and that one was Carl Dent.

He first took in the exact distance from the shore, and said to himself:

"If I fail I can reach land, I am sure. But I must not fail."

Then he took in the position of those in the boat.

The negro was snoring soundly, the skipper slept, and Mark also.

From beneath the seat forward, the seaman drew a pistol, and carefully examined the priming and flint, filling the pan with fresh powder from the horn to make sure.

Next he took up a musket and carefully prepared that with dry powder.

"Now the negro first, with the pistol; then the boy with the musket, and I'll knock the skipper in the head."

"It is but a moment and then I will be master here, and can readily tell the story how I am the only survivor."

So he mused, and, holding the musket resting across his arm, ready to fire quickly, he leveled his pistol at the head of Charcoal, took a slow, deliberate aim and pulled trigger.

There came the click of the flint, as it struck the steel, then a flash in the pan; the pistol had missed fire.

But the sound, slight as it was, aroused both Mark and Charcoal, and, as the mutineer tried to fire the musket, it was knocked from his hand by the tiller, which Mark had quickly seized.

The musket exploded, but no harm was done, and seeing his failure meant his quick death, he plunged overboard into the sea.

For a long time those in the boat watched for his coming to the surface, but he did not appear, and the skipper said:

"Well, Mark, there goes the last of our crew of cut-throats. So be it. He brought his death upon himself."

"If he is dead," suggested Mark in response, and the three once more sought the rest they needed.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXILES HOME.

UPON the banks of the Kennebec River, that picturesque stream so full of romance, the birthplace of many a brave ship and daring privateer, as well as seamen who would dare any danger, there still stand the ruins of a house that a hundred years ago was regarded with strange interest and mystery by the humble denizens of that region.

It was said that when General Arnold ascended the river, on his march with his army to Quebec, that a young officer was wounded in some mysterious way and left behind in the little tavern at Bath, Maine.

Who the officer was no one knew, more than his name, and that was Henri Montague.

If French, as was said, he certainly spoke English without seeming accent, and yet of his antecedents he had nothing to say.

He was said to have been wounded in a duel with a brother officer, whom he killed, but upon this subject too he was silent, though it was known that he had been one of a party of half a score to go down the river in a boat one morning early.

In the afternoon he had been brought back wounded, while another of the party was missing, and a new-made grave at a spot where they landed, might have been proof that rumor was not wholly at fault.

The officer, upon recovering from his wound, seemed in no haste to leave Bath, or to rejoin his command, wherever it was.

He had money and paid liberally for what he got, and devoted his leisure to riding on horse-

back through the adjacent country, or running up and down the river in a small sloop which he had purchased for his own use.

One day a new freak seemed to strike him, and that was to build him a house.

The place selected was near the very spot where had been the meeting between the one he had killed, as rumor had it, in a duel.

The grave was on the hillside, and unmarked, save by the mosses that had overgrown it.

The cabin the strange officer built was but a hundred yards away, and situated at a point that commanded a fine view of the river.

A number of acres were taken in and cleared, a most substantial cabin home was erected, and then the strange officer disappeared.

But within a few months he returned, and he was not alone, for he brought with him a young and beautiful wife.

He came in a small sloop, which was loaded with household goods, and from that day Henri Montague became a dweller upon the shores of the Kennebec.

To the surprise of the people, he began to run his sloop between Bath and Boston, which seemed to show that he was not the rich man they had believed him.

At his home he had three negro servants, a man and his wife and their son, a boy of twelve, and so black that Skipper Montague christened him Charcoal, a name which his parents seemed rather proud of than otherwise.

Those neighbors who sought to be friendly with the Montagues were not encouraged, and soon it became noised around that the strange officer was a French exile, a nobleman; but who, or what he really was, no one seemed to know.

Yet he soon became known as "The Exile," and "Montague the Exile."

As time passed on, two children were born to the house of Montague, a daughter and a son, the former being two years the senior of the latter.

As these grew old enough to go about, Charcoal became their devoted nurse, and he taught them to row, sail a boat, shoot a rifle and pistol, and to ride, for the Exile kept a couple of very fair horses.

Taught by their mother all that was necessary for them to learn from books, in that early age, for Mrs. Montague was a woman of refinement and education, and instructed by their father and Charcoal in all athletic sports, the two children grew up to be well instructed, fearless and skilled, and, at the early age of ten, Mark, the son, was wont to accompany his father on his coasting voyages.

As he advanced in years, Mark was made mate of the little sloop, and then his father having prospered, a stanch and fine schooner was built, and longer voyages were made, extending at times to the West Indies.

Had Captain Montague desired, he could have made money rapidly, running his schooner as a packet between the Kennebec ports and Boston; but he seemed to shun people and never carried a passenger, and this added to the belief of the people in his being an exile, or one who sought to hide from his fellow-men.

Seated on the porch of the comfortable cabin home one afternoon were Mrs. Montague and her daughter, Allene, a beautiful girl of seventeen at the time of which I write.

They were watching with interest a schooner, one of the Kennebec packets, that was standing in toward their home as though to anchor.

"Mother, I see Mark upon her deck. Yes, and Charcoal; but where is father?" said Allene, anxiously.

At her words Mrs. Montague turned deadly pale, and rising she walked quickly down toward the shore, her daughter accompanying her, and both of them dreading some evil, for Captain Montague had sailed away in his own stanch craft, and what had happened they could only conjecture.

CHAPTER VI.

MARK TURNS SKIPPER.

THE loss of the schooner was a severe blow to Captain Montague, for in it he had invested all his earnings for years, and he had paid for it in full, and had but little left.

But the thought that her husband and son had been spared to her far more than compensated Mrs. Montague for any regret regarding the vessel.

The skipper had to be lifted ashore from the packet schooner and borne up to his cabin, for his leg was in a bad condition, from all he had gone through, and the village doctor told him that he must lose it.

"My poor wife and children will starve," he

said, bitterly; but Mark overheard the remark and said quickly:

"Father, I can buy a shallop and with Charcoal and one seaman, can run cargoes to Boston and back, as you have told me that you did at first, and you need have no fear of starving."

Mark had proven himself so much of a man, so well able to take care of himself and those under him, that the skipper responded:

"I forgot, my son, that you are as good a sailor as I am."

"You carried the life-boat in safety to Portland, where we caught the packet for home, where many a man would have failed to do so, and you were devoted to poor Charcoal and myself."

"I will be a cripple, I know, and can never command a vessel again; but I can work at many things around here, while you will turn skipper."

"But where is the money to buy the shallop?"

"You know I would not let that last mutineer steal the money left by his mates, and I find it was considerable, nearly a thousand dollars, and sister Allene and I have talked it over, and we can, with the little we have laid by, make up a thousand, and with that sum in cash I can buy Judge Stanwood's pleasure sloop which he has never used."

"It will carry a good cargo and has fine accommodations for passengers, and there is more money in the latter than in freight, so I will do well, father, never fear."

"I do not doubt it, my son; but do not do anything yet; wait until Doctor Norcross has amputated my leg and see the result," and it was evident that the skipper feared the effect.

But Doctor Norcross was a skilled surgeon, having served in the British Army, and the operation was performed with skill, and the skipper soon stated to be out of danger.

Though Mark had said nothing more to the villagers than that they had lost their schooner, Charcoal had not been backward, and he had told over and over again of the heroism of the youth, who at once found himself indeed a hero.

Still it did not spoil him, the amount of praise showered upon him, and he set about his arrangements for getting the little sloop he had spoken of, in a way that showed he realized that the support of the family now devolved upon him.

The yacht was a pretty craft of thirty tons, and had been built by the great man of the village, Judge Stanwood, who was rich and all-powerful in the community.

He had had the vessel built for his own use, to go at will between the Kennebec and the coast towns, and his son was to command her.

But the son had entered upon a course that angered his father, and the pretty craft had never taken a cruise, other than her trial trip, in which she had shown both speed and good sea-going qualities.

She had laid by for a year, and the judge had at last offered her for sale for a fourth of her value, but found no purchaser until one day Mark Montague walked up to Rock Hill, the handsome mansion of the Stanwoods, and asked to see the master.

"Well, my lad, I congratulate you upon your escape, for I have been told of your vessel's loss and your heroism."

"You are a brave boy, and I only wish my wayward, worthless son was half like you," said the judge, as he entered the library and greeted Mark, whom he knew well by sight.

"Thank you, sir, for your kind words; but I called to see if you would sell me the Sea-Cat?"

"Sell you the Sea-Cat, my lad?"

"Now, what do you want with a yacht?"

"My father has had his leg amputated, sir, and will not be able to go to sea again, and, as we are poor now, I must work for the family, and I can make a good living with the Sea-Cat, and I heard you would take a thousand dollars for her."

"Well, you deserve credit, and you will succeed, my word on it, and I will throw all the work I can in your way, for I'll sell you the yacht for one thousand dollars, though she cost me a trifle over four times that much."

"I thank you, sir."

"But are you not very young for a skipper?"

"Yes, sir, but I am a good sailor, and father says he will trust me with a small vessel."

"Here is the money, sir, in bank-notes, and you will give me a paper, sir, won't you, to show the yacht is mine?"

"Certainly, my boy," and the papers were drawn up and signed, and Mark Montague returned home a very happy youth.

Ten days after, with the Sea-Cat painted up and in fine condition, and a crew of two lads about his own age, an old fisherman and Charcoal, the Sea-Cat set sail from Bath, bound to Boston, and to the delight of her young skipper, who was glad to see that people trusted him, he had a full cargo and passenger list, and brightly the future seemed opening before him, for, though a boy, he had suddenly found the duties of a man thrust upon him.

But Mark Montague was not one to shrink any duty or danger he was called upon to face and soon became known as the Boy Skipper.

CHAPTER VII.

FOES AND FRIENDS.

THE son for whom Judge Stanwood had built the Sea-Cat was a young man of twenty-two at the time this story opens.

In early life he promised well, and his father's influence procured for him a middy's berth in the Royal Navy.

But after three years of service he came home in disgrace, caused by his reckless career as a young officer.

His promise of reformation made his father do all in his power for him, and for a while he held to his good intentions, and the Sea-Cat was built for his especial use.

But ere she had made a second cruise, he entered once more upon his life of dissipation, and his father had the craft laid up, determined not to intrust her to the care of his reckless youth.

Haunting the village tavern, drinking and gambling with a few wild spirits that were congenial, Merton Stanwood soon became tolerated at home only under condition that he would never enter the house under the influence of liquor.

His father had paid considerable money to keep him out of trouble on numerous occasions, and still loved him, evil though he was.

The household at Rock Hill, the name of the home of Judge Stanwood, consisted of the master, his wild son, and Lola, his beautiful little daughter of twelve, with a number of servants, and the mansion was pointed to with pride by the villagers, as being the finest in that part of the country.

The day before the sailing of the "fleet and seaworthy packet-yacht, Sea-Cat," as Mark Montague advertised her, the young skipper was walking up to the village from his home, when he came suddenly upon Merton Stanwood and his sister Lola, on their way to Rock Hill.

Mark knew that pretty little Lola was in the habit of capturing her brother whenever she found him in the village, and making him go home with her, and that she had a great deal of influence over him.

Lola he had only known by sight, and Merton Stanwood he had several times met, and so he raised his cap politely as he was passing.

Merton Stanwood was a very handsome man, compactly built, and it was said that in spite of his wild ways, half the girls in the town were in love with him.

That he had been drinking his flushed face showed, and seeing Mark, he stopped short and said:

"So you are Mark Montague, the one the town fools are trying to make a hero of?"

His words and manner were most insulting, but Mark answered calmly:

"I am Mark Montague, Mr. Stanwood."

"The son of that mysterious exile?"

"I am the son of Captain Henri Montague, sir."

"His life is full of mystery, and yours, too, for that matter."

"For shame, brother, to insult the young gentleman!"

"Come with me," urged Lola, with spirit.

"No, I wish a talk with this hero."

"Pray do not mind him Master Mark, for he is not himself," said Lola, with tears in her eyes.

"I will say good-day, miss," and Mark was passing on, when Merton Stanwood sprung in front of him with the remark:

"My father has let you have my yacht."

"He sold me the Sea-Cat, sir."

"It was robbery to take her at that price."

"She had been offered for sale for a year at that price, sir, and I gave what was asked."

"And I suppose you will follow in your father's career with her, and turn smuggler?"

Mark's face flushed, and he replied hotly:

"But for the presence of your sweet sister, Mr. Stanwood, I would resent that insult with a blow."

"But I shall not forget it, sir."

"Now is the time, my fine fellow, for I fear-

"Your memory will fail you," was the sneering reply.

"Your sister's presence is your safeguard, sir."

"Oh, sir, I pray you pass on," cried Lola.

Mark attempted to do so, when Merton Stanwood placed himself firmly in his path.

"They tell me you are as agile as a cat, and strong as a young lion, so let us square our differences here."

"The quarrel is of your seeking, Mr. Stanwood, and not mine."

"So be it, I will force it to a conclusion."

"Take that!"

As he spoke he gave Mark an unexpected slap in the face.

A moment after he lay his length upon the ground, as still as though the breath had left his body.

"Oh, sir! you have killed him!" came in piteous accents from the lips of Lola.

"No, miss, he is only stunned, and will soon come round."

"I am sorry I struck him, but could not help it, when he slapped my face."

"I do not blame you, sir; but see how still he lies, and how white he is," and Lola spoke in a tone of horror.

"I will run to the river and bring my cap full of water."

"It will revive him."

Mark bounded away and in a minute returned, dashed the water into the face of unconscious man, and waited anxiously.

"He needs a little blood-letting, miss, for it will help him, and my father taught me how to do it," and while Lola turned her face away, he bared the arm, selected a vein, and with the point of his sharp penknife made a small incision.

As proof that Mark was right, that he needed bleeding, Merton Stanwood soon showed symptoms of returning consciousness, and Mark hastily stanched the flow of blood, and bound up the slight wound with his handkerchief, while Lola looked on with anxiety about her brother, and admiration for the youth who had so easily laid Merton Stanwood prostrate, and shown so much skill and kindness in reviving him.

The eyes of the young aristocrat opened and first rested upon his sister, while he asked in a bewildered way:

"What is it all about, Lola?"

"You struck Master Mark, brother, and he knocked you down."

"Then he revived you by a little blood-letting."

"You will be friends now, won't you?"

"No, we will be foes."

"You have a hard fist, Master Mark Montague, but you must know that the Stanwoods never forgive an injury."

"We are foes, remember, and I shall bear it in mind."

"And we are friends, sir, for I honor you for your kind act to my brother, after his insult to you," and Lola stepped forward and grasped Mark's hands, unheeding her brother's fierce words to come with him.

And Mark walked lightly on his way, musing to himself:

"How forgiving and kind Lola was to me."

"I hope her brother will think better of his quarrel with me; but he deserved what I gave him for his insult."

CHAPTER VIII. THE RESCUE.

THE first voyage of Mark Montague in the Sea-Cat was a perfect success.

He had carried a good cargo, a full passenger list, and made wonderful time on the run to Boston, touching on the way at both Portland and Portsmouth.

On his return he had come back with all the yacht could carry in hold and cabin, and caught in a fearful storm, he had shown his skill by weathering it, and while several other craft of large tonnage, stood off and on off Seguin Island, not daring to venture into the narrow entrance to the Kennebec by night, he had boldly run in and landed his passengers at Bath soon after sunrise.

This stamped the Boy Skipper as an able commander and skilled pilot, and from that day the passenger list of the Sea-Cat was kept full both going and coming, and Mark had the satisfaction of knowing that he was making a good living for his parents and sister.

But like his father he was reserved, and no one had ever broken through the ice, so to speak, and become intimate with the boy commander.

He was ever polite, but no one could solve the

secret of his father's life, as many tried to do, for the interest in the exile and his family did not wane, as years went on, and Mark was soon put down as the "Mysterious Boy Sailor."

One day as the Sea-Cat was returning from Boston, and coming up the river, the eye of her young commander detected a terrific squall coming down upon them.

It was above his home, that the sloop was, and in sight of the town, and Mark had observed a small skiff crossing the river, bearing a single occupant.

After stripping his vessel to meet the squall, which certainly had an ugly look, Mark turned his gaze upon the little skiff.

It was scudding for shore with all speed, yet a glance was sufficient to show that the wind-storm would strike it ere it reached a place of safety.

A moment more and a cry broke from many on the Sea-Cat, as the squall swooped down upon the little skiff and seemed to fairly drag it beneath the waves.

At the same instant a man was seen to run down to the shore, spring into a skiff and row out upon the river.

Then the scene was shut out from the view of those on the sloop, and the care of the Boy Skipper was needed for his own vessel.

An instant more the squall struck the Sea-Cat with great force, sending showers of spray upon her decks, and causing her to reel under the blow, but under her storm-sails only she quickly recovered and went plowing across the river as she beat up toward the town, where many were gathered on the wharves, despite the tempest, watching with interest and anxiety the effect upon the little packet, and also the fate of the one in the skiff.

After a few minutes' duration, as suddenly as it had come, the storm swept over, and with the Sea-Cat in perfect trim, those on board turned their gaze in search of the skiff that had been upset.

It was to be seen, drifting bottom upward, far away, and near where the storm had struck it was a boat, riding the rough waves at anchor.

Then a cry arose as in the waters were discovered two persons, one supporting the other, and swimming toward the anchored boat.

It was the man who had been seen going out to the rescue, and he had thrown over the anchor of his boat, plunged in and swam to the drowning one, and bravely risked his life to save that of another.

As the sloop drew near the rescuer reached his boat, and, with an effort placed the form of the one he had saved within.

It was the form of a woman.

Then came from half a dozen voices, as the rescuer drew himself into the boat:

"It is Merton Stanwood!"

"And he has saved my sister," came from the lips of Mark Montague in a tone of joy and regret commingled.

It was joy at Allene's safety, and regret that she should owe her life to such a man.

Luffing up sharp, Mark called out:

"Ho, Mr. Stanwood, kindly bring my sister alongside, and I will care for her."

Merton Stanwood glanced at the speaker, then said quietly:

"She has recovered from her swoon, sir, and I prefer to carry her to her home."

"Remember that my act does not change affairs between you and me."

Then he pulled rapidly away toward the Montague home, distant over a mile, while Mark held on toward the town.

In the mean time Merton Stanwood pulled rapidly toward the home of the young girl whom he had saved.

"I trust your ducking will not give you cold, madam," he said in a polite way.

"Oh, no, sir; but it was most brave and generous of you to come to my rescue."

"I should not have left the other shore, where I had gone to see the sick wife of a poor fisherman, but thought I could get across before the storm broke."

"I owe you my life, Mr. Stanwood, and that I am grateful you must know."

"I saw your danger and went to your aid."

"Your boat was tossed into the air, fairly, and I feared you were killed."

"I felt the shock, and the wind and waves beating in my face seemed to stun me, so that I could not swim."

"Then I felt you seize me, though I could not help myself."

"God bless you, Mr. Stanwood," and the tears came into the beautiful eyes of the young girl.

He made no reply for a moment, and then said:

"Yonder drifts your boat, and you can send after it."

"But I suppose you know that your brother is no friend of mine?"

"I have only heard him say that he was sorry for you."

"I care not for his pity; but did he not tell you of our meeting?"

"He has told me nothing."

"Humph! The boy is close-mouthed, then; but let me say that there is no friendship lost between us."

"Here we are at your home."

"Good-by, and having seen you, Allene Montague, I tell you flatly we shall meet again, whether a guest is ever allowed at your house or not."

"Again, good-by, and remember Merton Stanwood, for he shall not forget your sweet face."

Allene held out her hand, but the man did not take it; and springing ashore on the rocks, she turned to see him row rapidly away.

Pulling to the fisherman's cot, where he had taken the boat, he made it fast once more, and started on foot up over the hills toward his home.

As he reached the highway he came full upon a pedestrian, walking rapidly along.

It was Mark Montague.

CHAPTER IX.

A COMBAT.

"MR. STANWOOD, accept my hand in friendship, sir, after your noble act in saving my sister from death."

"I hurried away as soon as I landed, hoping to find you at my home."

Such was the manner in which Mark Montague met Merton Stanwood, when the two came together in the highway.

In response to the manly greeting, Merton Stanwood gazed in an insulting manner at the outstretched hand, and then said:

"I told you, Master Mark Montague, that what I did to rescue your sister, did not alter my feeling toward you."

"I was in hopes that it would, for your noble act has greatly changed my feeling toward you, sir."

"I prefer your hatred."

"You refuse that we shall be friends, then?"

"I do."

"I am sorry."

"I am glad."

"Good-afternoon, sir."

Mark was passing on when the young profli-gate called out:

"My sister is not with me to-day, Mark Montague, to protect you."

"To protect me?"

"Yes."

"How, pray?"

"From a whipping at my hands."

"If I remember aright, sir, her presence protected you, for you deserved more than I gave you."

"Ha! this to me?"

"And why not?"

"A low-born dog thus address a gentleman?"

As he spoke, Merton Stanwood advanced quickly after the youth.

Mark turned at once.

"Mr. Stanwood, your sister protected you from a sound drubbing once, and that you have but now saved my sister from death, protects you."

"I beg you to let matters rest as they are."

"Boy, you are insolent, and I shall punish you."

"Come, up with your hands, for I mean to whip you!"

As he spoke, Merton Stanwood sprung toward Mark.

He was taller, larger than the youth, and he was noted for his strength and hard blows.

That Mark had knocked him down upon a former occasion, he had deemed an accident, being wholly unprepared for what he did not expect.

Now he was ready for a fray, in which he should teach Mark a lesson.

All drenched as he was, he preferred that time to another, when witnesses might be present.

Not that he feared the consequences of a battle between them, though Mark was known to be a youth far above the average of one of his years; but he preferred to feel of his prowess when alone.

So he walked up to the scratch, ready for battle.

Mark had been well taught by his father, both in the science of boxing and fencing.

He had a bright eye, cool head and nerve of iron, and he knew his remarkable strength.

Even though opposed to a man, and that man reckless Merton Stanwood, he did not quail, and the smile never left his lips.

"Now, boy, take your punishment like a man, and then keep clear of my path."

"Here's at you!"

As he spoke Merton Stanwood dealt a severe blow that was meant for the face of the youth.

It failed to reach there, being caught on the arm of Mark, who at the same instant sent out his left fist with a stinging blow upon the forehead of his enemy.

Maddened by it Merton Stanwood dealt blow after blow most savagely, all of which were neatly parried, while several of Mark's found a lodging-place upon the face and chest of his enemy.

Merton Stanwood knew that he was being whipped at his own game.

His nose was bleeding, his lips and brow were cut, there were several lumps rising elsewhere upon his face, and one eye would be soon encircled by a bruised ring.

He had not yet hurt his enemy, and the smile upon the youth's face drove him almost to frenzy.

So he made another desperate assault, and dropping the science of boxing, sought to grasp Mark in his arms and hurl him to the ground.

But Mark nimbly avoided him, raining blows meanwhile upon him that fairly staggered him, and Merton Stanwood was forced to draw off for an instant.

"Curse you, boy, I will have your life!"

Suddenly he uttered the words, and drawing a dirk from his breast pocket, he sprung toward Mark.

At that instant the youth's eye fell upon the stout stick which he had thrown down, to greet Merton Stanwood upon meeting him, and seizing it, he dealt a blow upon the uplifted arm that caused it to fall, and the dirk to drop to the ground.

Then he sprung forward, and giving Stanwood a blow in the face with his fist, picked up the dirk and sent it flying off in the thicket, as far as he could throw it.

Merton Stanwood reeled under the blow, his arm seemed benumbed by the force with which it had been struck by the stick, and he had sense enough to see that Mark Montague was master of the situation.

"You have beaten me fairly, Master Mark, and I own up."

"Let us be friends."

He held out his hand, and Mark, too generous in his nature to suspect his proffered friendship, accepted the offered truce.

"Let me look to your hurts, Mr. Stanwood," he said.

"No, I will go home."

"Good-by, Montague," was the abrupt response, and Merton Stanwood walked off.

But he quickly turned and said:

"Master Mark?"

"Well, Mr. Stanwood?"

"Let us not speak to any one of our quarrel to-day."

"Certainly not, sir, for I would rather have it so."

Then Stanwood walked briskly on toward Rock Hill, while Mark went home and congratulated his sister upon her rescue, speaking in the highest terms of his late foe.

Upon returning to his vessel, however, he learned that a servant from Rock Hill had been boasting of the bravery of young Master Merton in saving the exile's daughter, and how he had been struck in the face and severely hurt on the arm by the boat beating him in the face.

"If that is his story of his injuries, let it be so," muttered Mark, with a smile, and he caressed his right hand, which was sore from the pounding it had given Merton Stanwood.

CHAPTER X.

THE SMUGGLERS.

In a secluded cove on the coast of Maine, several months after the rescue of Allene Montague by Merton Stanwood, a vessel lay at anchor.

To outward appearances she was a coaster from some of the seaports eastward.

But a close survey of her fine lines showed that she was built with the double view of great speed and sea-going qualities.

She was very sharp forward, and high, was low amidships, and had a narrow, swallow-tail

stern that rose some distance over the water, as was common in boats of those days.

Her rig was that of a schooner, and her masts were very tall, her bowsprit very long, showing that she could pile on the canvas if needed, in a great degree.

Not a soul was visible upon her decks, but on a rocky shelf jutting out from the rugged shore, and some forty feet from the water, were a group of men.

They were a wild-looking set, and seamen, all of them, from their appearance.

Behind them arose a cliff of rock, and to one gazing at them from the water, it would be wondered how they got there, for no means were visible, and certainly there was no pathway leading around the cliff, and to scale it would be impossible, as it towered sixty feet above their heads.

Behind the men, however, the secret could be discovered by a keen eye, for a sail, painted so as to resemble the face of the cliff, was hung over the entrance to a large cavern.

This cavern was their home when ashore, and the storehouse for their booty, for the men were smugglers.

The cabin ran back into the hills, into the midst of a pine thicket, two hundred feet away, and here was its land entrance.

To reach the ship from the sea, the schooner was drawn alongside of the rock, in quiet weather, for there was ample depth of water, and a board was brought from the cavern and run out to the cross-trees.

The men on the rocky shelf numbered a score, and they were all armed.

Though no foe was near them they talked in the low tone of men accustomed to have their lives in deadly peril at all times.

From the Canadas to Dangerland Sound it was known that these were determined and daring smugglers, men who were considered in fact coast freebooters as well, when an unarmed vessel fell in their way, but where their haunts were no one could tell, and the islands, not the mainland, were generally sought as their hiding-place.

Suddenly the canvas curtain over the entrance to the cavern was dashed to one side, and a man appeared, whose coming caused a murmur of seeming pleasure from the group upon the rocky shelf.

The stranger was a man who was attired as a sea captain of that age, and had a frank, manly face, though he was none other than the leader of the smugglers.

He was a young man, the youngest of the lot, hardly over twenty-four, and his appearance indicated that he had been well born and reared in a better manner than his comrades.

Still he was none other than an outlaw, and one whose daring deeds had defied detection and capture.

He was known among his men as Captain Caspar, and the coasters looked upon him as nothing better than a pirate, and called him Caspar the Corsair.

"Well, lads, we must get on board, for there is work ahead of us, and I think the haul will be a rich one," he said in a free and easy manner that seemed natural to him.

"I have just returned from meeting one who has given me a chance to seize a craft that will be most useful to us."

"We gave her a chase once, but the wind was light and the sea smooth, so she held her own; but we will go prepared to take her this time."

"She will be our prize, with what cargo she has on board; but she is to bring out a few kegs of gold, I am told, and that I have pledged to keep for another, the one who gives me the information."

"We may have to fight, for her skipper is one to defend his craft; but we will take her anyhow, as there will not be a dozen men on board, I am sure, including passengers."

"Now lads, get on board, and when the Shark returns to her anchorage, I hope she will have with her the Sea-Cat as a prize."

"Is it the packet yacht Sea-Cat, Captain Caspar, that you mean?" asked one of the crew.

"Yes, Bruiser Bill, it is."

"She is commanded by a boy."

"I have heard her skipper was a mere youth."

"He'll fight you, tooth and nail."

"Let him, we can capture her."

"Be prepared to have her outrun us too, captain."

"Nonsense, she can never outsail the Shark."

"I sailed in her, captain, the first cruise she made, and she picked up everything she went

for, from a clipper-ship out of Portland, to the pink-sterned shallop along the coast, and they sail well."

"I have confidence in the Shark catching anything afloat, Bruiser Bill," replied Captain Caspar; but the man, who was mate of the Shark, shook his head dubiously, and muttered:

"The Shark is fast, but somehow I think the Sea-Cat is faster."

"But we will see who is right when we run across her."

CHAPTER XI.

SIGHTING THE SHARK.

So popular had the Sea-Cat become that all who had to voyage by sea between the Kennebec ports, Portland, Portsmouth and Boston, preferred to go as passengers on her to taking larger vessels.

No matter what the weather, Mark Montague went in and out of port, day or night, and he seemed to be fairly endowed with instinct in finding his way through dangers.

The state-rooms of the yacht were large, the table was good, for Charcoal was an excellent cook, and Mark took pride in furnishing his passengers with the best that the markets had.

His father had taken two trips with him, and took pride in his brave young boy's work as a skipper.

Then his mother had gone on one voyage, and Allene on another, and though Mark was a boy at home, on his deck he was every inch a man and a skillful seaman and they could not but so regard him.

He had been compelled to increase his crew, having besides old Buntline, who was his right-hand man and mate, and Charcoal as cook, two cabin-boys, who at odd times helped as sailors, and two more lads who were regularly shipped as seamen.

One day, as he was about to get up sail for the run out of Boston Harbor, Merton Stanwood came hastily down to the wharf and sprang on board.

Between him and Mark, since their combat, there had been apparent friendship, though the young skipper was not at all enthusiastic in his admiration of Stanwood.

Merton Stanwood had reformed, so it was said, and yet people shook their heads when they heard of his reformation.

He seemed to have a great liking for Mark, and had called upon Allene at her home, sometime after saving her life.

But, though Captain Montague and his wife were full of gratitude, they did not encourage his visits, and he had not dared call again.

Now, as he sprung on board the Sea-Cat he said:

"Just in time, Mark; but if you have not a berth for me, I will bunk in with the crew."

Mark was sorry he had come.

He had one berth in the cabin and told him so; but then, his sister Allene was on board, and he half-suspected that Stanwood had come on the Sea-Cat for that reason, as he had gone to Boston some weeks before, he knew, by stage.

He paid his passage-money, threw his little carpet-bag in his berth, and made himself at home by at once walking up to Allene and addressing her.

She knew how Mark felt toward the young profligate, and her face colored; but she could not be rude to the man who had saved her life, and she would not be, even if it angered her brother.

As the Sea-Cat sailed out of the harbor the sun was setting, and the evening was a delightful one, so that all of the passengers were on deck.

Among his passengers Mark had four females, and including Merton Stanwood, seven males, which, with his sister, himself and crew made nineteen souls on board.

He had also a valuable cargo, and, what was more, a couple of iron-bound kegs of gold, which had been sent by his Boston agent to Judge Stanwood.

The judge had asked Mark to bring him the gold, and told him he had better keep it a secret, so that it had been stowed away in the cabin the night before, and Charcoal alone knew of its being on board, besides the young skipper, excepting Allene, in whose state-room it had been put.

As there were several thousands of dollars in the kegs, Mark was anxious, for he knew that freebooters on the coast were often met with.

But he depended upon the Sea-Cat, as he had never yet met with a craft that could catch her.

The moon rose as the sun went down, and after supper the passengers came on deck to enjoy

the beauty of the night, for the wind was balmy, though fresh.

Allene had her Spanish guitar, a present from Mark, and possessed of a fine voice, she sung several songs, Merton Stanwood joining her in duets.

Then he played and sang, and in spite of his dislike for him, Mark could not but think he had a superb voice.

And Allene seemed to think so too, for she kept asking him to sing again and again.

"Sail, ho!"

The cry from forward caused a silence upon deck.

The yacht was now running free, and making ten knots an hour, and the sail was sighted off her starboard bow and heading so as to cross either ahead or astern of her.

Mark took his glass and examined her closely.

"Buntline?"

"Well, Master Mark."

"Do you remember the schooner that chased us two months ago, and which we outfooted, though she held her own well with us?"

"Ay ay, sir."

"That is the same craft."

"She looked ugly then, sir."

"Yes, and one of our passengers thought she was the smuggler, or freebooter, commanded by Caspar."

"Yes, and like as not she is, but if we dropped her once we can again."

"I hope so, Buntline; but the wind is much stronger to-night, and there is a lumpy sea, and her larger hull will go through it better."

"Still we will try and give her a wide berth, and if it comes to a chase, do our best."

"If it should be the Shark, Master Mark, she can't carry over twenty men, sir, even if she did overhaul us."

"And you mean we could fight them off?"

"Yes."

"Of course, for we have just fourteen men, including the crew, and I carry, you know, some boxes of muskets and ammunition, for the fort at Augusta, and I would break them open and arm all on board."

"You've got the grit, Master Mark, to do it, but see, sir, the schooner is certainly heading toward us."

"Yes, so we will change our course and run out to sea."

The order was promptly given, and almost instantly, following the schooner's course was changed, and it at once became a chase.

"That craft is the smuggler schooner, Shark, Skipper Montague," said an old merchant who was a passenger on the Sea-Cat.

"So I thought, Mr. Hastings."

"I know her well, for she has chased packets I have been in several times, and once robbed me of a thousand dollars in stock."

"He is called a smuggler, but is more of a corsair."

"Well, Mr. Hastings, he has no heavy guns on board, and if we cannot outrun him we can fight him off," was the cool reply of the young skipper.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEA-CAT AND THE SHARK.

WHEN the smuggler craft was sighted from the Sea-Cat, she was very near, and had evidently been lying under bare poles, to avoid being seen.

As soon as she set sail she was discovered to windward of the Sea-Cat, and not more than a mile away.

When the sloop changed her course, it brought the Shark upon her weather quarter, and the schooner came down under a cloud of canvas.

The sloop sailed well, but in that lumpy sea and stiff breeze, could not set her-topsail; hence the schooner gained on her."

The Shark had both topsails set, and seemed to fairly fly through the waters, her larger hull taking the lumpy seas better than the Sea-Cat.

"I'm loaded a trifle too heavy, and the schooner will catch us," said Mark, quietly, addressing Buntline and Charcoal.

"Yes, sir, we are loaded down in the head; but if the sea was not so frisky, and we had this wind, we could outstep the schooner," declared Buntline, confidently; "but, as all is against us, we must prepare to fight."

"Charcoal, go down in the hold and open several of those boxes of muskets, and bring them on deck. We want two apiece, and the ammunition you can put in the cabin under my sister's charge."

"Yas, sah."

"You do not intend to fight, Mark?" asked Merton Stanwood, coming forward.

"Yes, certainly."

"It will be madness."

"It shall be madness then, for I shall beat those fellows off."

"If it is the Shark, I have heard she carries thirty men."

"It is the Shark, Mr. Stanwood."

"And you have but seven."

"In crew, yes; but there are seven male passengers on board."

"Ah! you count on *our* help, then?"

"Certainly I do!"

"I admire your pluck, and count me in; but I fear for the others."

"The man on this craft who refuses to help will be a coward, and I shall put him in the hold until I reach port," was the prompt reply.

Mark then went aft, and calling the passengers about him, said:

"I am sorry to tell you, that yonder schooner is the freebooter known as the Shark. She has no heavy guns on board, but carries about thirty men, and she will try and capture us. We are fourteen men, and I have some Government muskets on board, three each, if need be, and my sister can load them, as we empty them, and the other ladies will help her I know; so I propose to fight."

"I have a valuable cargo, and several times have heard that Caspar the Corsair, who commands yonder schooner, wants this vessel."

"If we were differently loaded we could outrun the schooner, but as it is I hope to be able to fight her off, and every *man* on board will help me."

"Well said, Master Mark, and the one who does not is not a *man*," responded the old merchant, Mr. Hastings.

The muskets, bright and new, were now brought out of the hold, sixty in number, and taking them to the cabin, they were quickly loaded.

Then, as it would be a stern chase, Mark had some bales of cloth brought on deck, and arranged with boards so as to form a breastwork, across the yacht aft, four feet high, so as to protect the marksmen.

He divided his defenders into two parties of five, who were to do the firing, one party falling back after a volley, and the other taking its place.

Of the remaining four he put three to looking after the sailing of the sloop, while he was free to have an eye upon his vessel and its defenders.

When all was ready the schooner was within range, and down on the wind came the hail:

"Sloop, ahoy!"

"Aboy the schooner!" responded Mark, through his trumpet, for he had to send his voice against the wind.

"What sloop is that?"

"The Sea-Cat of the Kennebec. What schooner is that?"

"The Shark!"

"The freebooter?"

"If you will have it so."

"Then keep off, or I will fire into you," pluckily called out Mark.

A derisive laugh from the schooner was the response, and Merton Stanwood said, in a low tone:

"I fear you are doing wrong, Mark, to resist, for you may anger them, while, otherwise, they would only take your cargo, and no one would blame you for giving up."

"If they get this cargo, Mr. Stanwood, it will be after a hard fight."

"Ready there, all of you, with your muskets, for I will make the first volley a heavy one. After that fire by fives, as planned."

The ten men with muskets were ranged in line, and Mark and Allene also held weapons.

"Ready all! Take aim—fire!" cried the Boy Skipper.

With the words the muskets flashed forth flame and lead.

Cries from the schooner, and her suddenly sweeping half up into the wind showed that it was a complete surprise to the freebooters.

Then howls and curses arose, savage threats were uttered, and the schooner came on in chase.

"Fire by squads now, and take careful aim," coolly commanded Mark, an order which the defenders of the sloop obeyed promptly, five heavy musket balls were hurled right among the freebooter crew. There came answering shots from the schooner, while the order was distinctly heard:

"Get up that six-pounder from the hold, and train it upon those devils!"

The order seemed to momentarily demoralize the Sea-Cat crew. Seeing this, Mark Montague came quickly to the rescue.

He had one heavy long-range deer-rifle on board, and with this he determined to go up into the main cross-trees and open on those on the deck of the schooner.

"Keep her headed as she is, and I will see if I cannot keep them from using the gun," he said, as composedly as if the daring act was not one of exceeding danger.

Then he took his rifle, and strapping it to his back, went aloft.

An instant he stood there, gazing through his glass at the schooner.

He was somewhat protected by the mast, and the furled topsail, and fearing that he might be wounded, he tied himself firmly in position. Then he called out:

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Buntline.

"Keep up a steady and well-aimed fire on the schooner, and I believe you can drive her crew to shelter; while I can pick off men from here. Every shot will bring its man!" and bracing himself well, he took deliberate aim at the group around the open hatch on the Shark, and pulled trigger.

With the flash of his rifle a pirate fell dead, and a cry of terror arose from his outlaw comrades.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

HAVING found that his rifle would reach his foes, and observing them scatter, Mark loaded and fired rapidly, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the men hunt cover from his shots.

He called down to the deck to continue firing rapidly, which they did, and the outlaws being now within easy range of the schooner, the freebooters dared not expose themselves on their decks, but crowding forward under the bulwarks, returned the fire.

But for the foresight of Mark Montague in raising the breastwork across the stern, a number on the Sea-Cat would have been killed, or wounded.

As it was but two had been hurt, and they but slightly.

Seeing that the Shark still slowly but steadily gained, Mark decided upon a plan to bring her to.

The pirates had discovered his presence very quickly in the top, and began to fire on him rapidly, realizing that he held the most deadly weapon.

About him their bullets pattered, chipping the mast, and cutting into the tightly furled sail; but so far he had remained unhurt.

"If I can keep a man from the wheel, she will have to come to," said the young skipper as he raised his rifle and took deliberate aim at the helmsman.

It was some time before he could fire, as he wished to be certain of his aim.

Then he was anxious to guard himself from the bullets pattering about him.

At last he drew trigger. With the crack of his rifle the helmsman sprung to one side, releasing the tiller, and then bounded, or fell down the companionway into the cabin, but which Mark could not tell.

The schooner, freed from the guidance of her rudder, ran up into the wind, almost before another man reached the helm.

But almost as soon as he got there Mark had his rifle loaded and ready.

A moment to secure perfect aim, and at the flash of the young skippers' rifle, the helmsman fell across the tiller, his hands clutching wildly at the air.

The schooner swayed from her course, a stern voice ordered another man to the helm, and once more Mark reloaded his rifle.

Hardly had the third helmsman placed his hand upon the tiller, when he released his hold and sprung for the cabin, for the rifle-bullet had shattered his hand.

Then the schooner swept up into the wind, for no one cared to come under that deadly aim.

Seeing that his men refused, Captain Caspar himself ran to the helm, and ordered his men to their posts.

"Keep up a rapid fire! Shoot every one who leaves cover!"

The order came from Mark aloft, and the firing of the sloop was rapidly kept up, and the pirates were driven back to cover.

In the mean time Mark Montague had reloaded his rifle and was taking deliberate aim at the daring chief, who held the tiller of his vessel, while he shouted loudly and sternly to his men, to obey his orders and go to the sheet ropes.

But no one obeyed, with that leaden hail

from the sloop pattering along the decks, and the captain also deserted the wheel, as he felt a tingling sensation in his shoulder which told him that the deadly marksman in the cross-trees of the sloop was in earnest that no one should hold the helm of the Shark.

As the schooner now lay to the sloop slipped rapidly away from her.

Instantly Mark came down from the rigging, and his words stirred the crew to action.

"They will get out of range, rig up a barrier to protect the helmsman and get that cannon up out of the hold."

"Then they will give chase again."

"Quick, all of you! let us get the extra cargo aft so as to trim ship, and set topsails, even if it does blow, and I believe we can outrun him."

All sprung to obey excepting Merton Stanwood, who said:

"He has given up the chase, so what is the use of this extra work, Mark?"

"He has not given it up, nor will Captain Caspar do so as long as he has hope."

"Please aid us, Mr. Stanwood, for this is a time when all should do their duty."

"Here, sister Allene, you take the helm and work up to windward of the schooner while you can."

Allene sprung to the tiller, for she well knew how to manage a boat, but seeing that blood was upon the hand of her brother, she cried anxiously:

"Oh Mark! you are wounded!"

"It is but a scratch on the arm, sister."

"Now we must all work."

The men already had the forward hatches open and were hauling out the cargo forward, which had given the sloop such a bad trim as to hurt her sailing.

It was hastily carried a ft and placed wherever needed most, and all worked like beavers.

The change was soon made manifest in the improved sailing of the Sea-Cat, and then Mark ordered the topsails set.

It was blowing pretty fresh, and the sloop having changed her course meanwhile, and shot up to windward of the schooner, she lay well over under the pressure of the wind.

But with one of the lady passengers to help her at the tiller, Allene kept her on her way until Charcoal came to relieve her of the strain.

"I tell yer, Missy Allene I doesn't see how yer c'u'd hold ther craft as yer did, fer she pulls pow-erful hard," said Charcoal, as he took the tiller.

"It was hard work, Coal, but we did it," replied Allene, rubbing her blistered hands.

With the sloop now in proper trim, and as he intended to hold on his present course toward Portsmouth, where he was to touch, Mark had his people haul freight to windward, and all hands also went up close under the weather bulwark, which helped amazingly to keep the yacht on a more level keel, against the pressure of the wind on the large amount of canvas she was carrying.

That his young foe had gotten the best of him and run to windward, while he was arranging to protect his crew in another effort to catch him, Captain Casper well knew.

But the schooner had shown her superiority of sailing before in the chase, and he did not doubt but that he could overhaul her long before she reached Portsmouth.

The wind also seemed to be growing stronger, and he hoped the sloop would not be able to carry her topsails, while he knew that the schooner could do so.

Then, no longer under fire, his men were hastily getting from its hiding-place in the hold, the six-pounder that the smuggler kept for an occasion of need, along with one other, which could be used in beating off a boat attack.

The schooner was pierced for guns, but had never carried them on her deck, as Captain Caspar was more often wont to masquerade as an honest coasting craft than an outlaw.

When at last a barricade of hatches was erected in front of the helmsman, to guard him against the deadly fire from the top of the sloop and the gun was gotten upon deck and ready for firing, the sloop was over half a mile away and going like a race-horse.

The schooner then gave chase, and soon from her bows flashed the six-pounder.

But the shot flew wild, and it did not take Captain Caspar very long to discover that he was not gaining upon the sloop.

What could it mean?

Not knowing of the shift in her cargo, he could not answer that question; but it soon dawned upon him that the sloop, in spite of the increasing wind, and sea growing rougher, was keeping her pace steadily ahead of his fleet schooner.

He saw the sloop's topsail taken in, and still he did not gain, for the change seemed to improve her sailing, while she did not keel over to such a dangerous angle as before.

All the time his six-pounder kept up a hot fire on the little packet, and now and then a shot was seen to cut through her sail, and once it was thought to have torn along her deck.

But the Sea-Cat held on and at last, as he feared he might get himself into trouble, in being off-shore at daylight chasing a sloop, he was forced to give up the chase, while the Sea-Cat went flying along, all on board happy at her escape.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEA-CAT'S RETURN.

WHEN the Sea-Cat ran into Portsmouth her appearance indicated that she had been through a severe ordeal.

She had become well known in port, and her Boy Skipper was a hero already in the thoughts of the people of the town.

But when the passengers had told the story of their escape, Mark Montague was looked upon as a marvel, and when he came down the street to the wharf, to board his vessel and again put to sea, for he had gone to report his being chased to the authorities, he was cheered by the large crowd that had gathered to look upon the packet.

The Sea-Cat had by no means escaped unscathed, any more than had her crew.

One of those on board, a passenger from Portsmouth, had been killed by the fire of the schooner, the shot that had torn along her decks, and fired by the six-pounder.

Then several others had been slightly wounded, among the latter being her daring young skipper, who had been clipped on the arm by a bullet, the wound, however, being but slight.

Through the huge sail of the Sea-Cat several holes showed where the solid shot had cut through, and the stern and mast were peppered with musket balls, the barrier having caught nearly a hundred.

Again the Sea-Cat set sail, and running out well to sea, saw nothing of her enemy, and ran into Portland in safety.

Arriving within several leagues of the mouth of the Kennebec, by day, Mark sighted a sail far off, which he knew to be the Shark, and the bold outlaw tried to cut him off from entering the river.

It was wholly a question of speed now; but when in Portland the sloop had been put in perfect trim, her sails patched, and she showed her splendid sailing qualities by running under the shelter of Seguin Island, and thence into the mouth of the river, while the schooner was yet a mile away.

The disappointed schooner fired a shot from her six-pounder, which fell short, and then hauled off, going seaward under full sail, while the Sea-Cat held on her way up to Bath, and was greeted by tremendous cheering from the crowds that gathered to receive her, for the stage from Portland had arrived, and the escape of the packet from the pirate had already been reported, and Mark's heroism was upon every lip.

Among the first to grasp his hand upon his arrival was Judge Stanwood, who had been most anxious about the safety of the packet, knowing that she brought a large amount of gold for him.

"My boy, you are a hero indeed, and I owe you my heartfelt thanks, and wish to reward you in any way that you may name."

"My reward, Judge Stanwood, was in doing my duty, and it is the only one I care for or will accept."

"Well said, lad; but some day I will reward you as you deserve."

"What say you to a middy's berth in the Royal Navy?"

"I should like it, sir, above all things, for I believe I am ambitious to rise higher than a skipper's berth on a coasting craft."

"I will go with you to Boston soon, and apply for the berth for you."

"But how did my boy behave?"

"Like all the rest, sir; he did his duty, though I do not think he had much confidence in our escaping capture."

"And you?"

"I felt that we had the means to beat the pirate off, and should use them."

"I broke open two cases of the Government's guns, but they served us well, and otherwise our capture would have been almost certain."

"They are for Major Deering at the fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"He will be glad to know that you used them for he is a fine fellow and admires pluck."

"When will you take them to him?"

"As soon as I get my other cargo out, sir, I will run down to the fort and discharge what I have for Major Deering; but I wish I could get permission to carry a couple of small guns and a score of muskets, if I am to expect trouble from coast pirates."

"That can be arranged, Mark, and I will see to it. Ah! here is my little daughter Lola, come to congratulate you upon your heroism."

As the judge spoke, Lola came on board the Sea-Cat and frankly offered her hand to the young skipper, while she said in her pretty way:

"I had to come too, Master Mark, to shake hands with you, and see the scars on your vessel."

"You were not much hurt, I hope?"

"No, thank you, Miss Lola, I only got a scratch; but one passenger was killed, and two of our brave defenders slightly wounded; but I see my sister is waiting for me to go home, so I will say good-by," and Mark doffed his tarpaulin and went into the skiff alongside, where Allene was already seated, with her purchases, and Charcoal had the oars.

Leaving Buntline in charge of the sloop, Mark and Allene were rowed rapidly home by Charcoal, and were met at the landing by Captain Montague on his crutches, Mrs. Montague and Abram and Chloe the parents of the brave negro man who so bravely and faithfully followed the fortunes of his young master.

"Uncle" Abram, as all called him, had been up to the town and heard the news, and as the sloop had sailed by, Mark and Allene had seen their parents waving to them, and now, the greeting they received was one of great joy and affection.

"My brave boy, you will yet make your name known the world over," said the exile, impressively.

"Sister deserves as much credit as I do, father, for she cares no more for bullets than she does for rain," was Mark's rejoinder in his sister's well-earned praise.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET MEETING.

SEVERAL days after the arrival of the Sea-Cat in port, after her escape from the Shark, she set sail again for Boston, and there was considerable anxiety felt regarding her safety on the voyage, as it was supposed that she might again be chased by the pirate schooner.

At that time there was no cruiser upon the coast, but a request for one had been forwarded to the representatives of the king in Boston, and it was hoped that there would be a vessel-of-war sent to cruise between the Penobscot and Portsmouth, where there was most danger of coasters falling in with freebooters.

Still the danger of the cruise did not deter the young skipper from sailing, and he went off with a large cargo and a cabin full of passengers, running out of the river, as was his wont, in the night time.

Standing upon a high eminence, gazing down upon the dark river, dotted only by the white sail of the Sea-Cat as she was gliding seaward, was a man who had long stood watching and waiting there.

At times he grew impatient, paced to and fro, and muttered words in a tone of anger.

At last his eyes fell upon a form approaching from the town, and he said abruptly:

"It is time, for I am tired out with waiting."

The spot where he stood was a cliff overhanging the river, and some hundred yards away from the highway leading to the town.

The one who was approaching came from the highway, along a path that branched off toward the cliff.

"Well, captain, I thought you would never come," said the one who had been waiting, and advanced toward the new-comer.

"I came as soon as I dared leave the tavern."

"I have to be careful, you know, as there are people in the town who know me," said the other.

"Yes, and you should wear a disguise that no one could penetrate."

"But our plan was a failure."

"It was, and through no fault of either yours or mine."

"I did my duty, for I told you what a valuable cargo the sloop was to bring out on that run, and that there was also some good picking among the passengers, while the performance of the Sea-Cat shows that she would have been a valuable prize for you for your work."

"She will be, for I shall yet catch her; but I heard how she was loaded down in the head and could not sail at first, and that her skipper shifted her cargo to suit him."

"I tell you, shipmate, that youth will make an admiral of himself some day."

"If his life is not cut short, yes."

"Why, he handled his craft splendidly, and I tell you frankly I suffered more than I wished to and not meet with success."

"You had some of your crew killed?"

"Two, and ten wounded, though one only seriously."

"They rained upon us a hot shower of lead, I tell you, and when young Skipper Montague took to picking off my helmsmen from the cross-trees he had things his own way."

"I felt sure of overhauling the sloop, so did not get under way again until I had my barrier up before the helmsman, and my gun mounted for use."

"Then I discovered that the sloop was outsailing me."

"Yes, after she was trimmed aright."

"But I learn that Judge Stanwood had over four thousand in gold in his kegs?"

"So I believe."

"So you doubtless knew when you arranged with me that you should have them, when I caught the sloop."

"The sloop and her cargo, with the pickings from the passengers, were worth far more."

"Yes, but I would not wish to see an informant get as much as you would have had, with my capture of the sloop, and I can make no more such terms with you."

"Then there is no need of our talking business, for I shall not work for less than my price."

"And your price?"

"One-third of the value of your capture."

"Leaving two-thirds for my crew and myself?"

"Yes."

"I will not give it."

"All right, there are others who will."

"What others?"

"You are not the only freebooter upon this coast, Captain Caspar."

"There are others, I admit; but I hold the greater power, and I shall continue to do so."

"Let us not quarrel, for I can be more useful to you, than can you be to me, but I have my terms, and if not satisfactory refuse them, and perhaps another time we can agree on other matters."

"I wish that I knew just who you are."

"That has nothing to do with the matter, Captain Caspar."

"You know me as I am."

"Yes, but you are an outlaw."

"And you?"

"It matters not who or what I am."

"I have the means of placing in your hands information from time to time, that will enrich us both, and also keep you clear of cruisers."

"This is risky work, meeting you here, and I will have a place of meeting down the river, where you can send a boat once a week for information."

"There is a place known as the Tower Rock, and just near it is a large tree in which letters or packages can be placed."

"Have your messenger deposit a letter for me there each week, and I will place one there for you, with full information."

"Now say whether it is to be thirds between us, and a third for your crew, on all you get through me?"

"If not, I will know just what to do."

"I can but agree to your terms; but am I not to know you by some name?"

"Why need you?"

"How shall I address you by letter?"

"Call me simply Spy, and expect a letter in the place I refer to on Sunday next."

"I will go there, or send, as you direct."

"Good-night," and with this the stranger turned and walked away in the darkness, leaving Captain Caspar standing alone and gazing after him.

"I must know who that man is, for I will not be served by one whom I have no hold upon."

"I will follow him."

So saying the freebooter captain took from a small hand-bag he carried, several articles, and in a few moments he was completely disguised as an old man with long gray hair and beard.

Then he started off on the track of his mysterious comrade.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CRUISER IN PERIL.

THE Sea-Cat was on her outward run for Boston.

Mark Montague was at the helm, and the pretty craft was stripped for a storm, for there was ugly weather outside.

As she neared the mouth of the river there broke on the ears of those on board the sound of heavy firing, and it grew louder and louder.

"What can it mean, Master Mark?" asked old Buntline, while the passengers, aroused by the firing and the pitching of the sloop, as she neared the sea, came on deck in some alarm.

"It can mean but one thing, Buntline," answered Mark.

"You mean a sea-fight, sir?"

"Yes."

"Between a Frenchman and a king's cruiser?"

"Certainly, and they seem to be coming this way, as the guns sound louder and louder."

The night was very dark, and a southeast storm raging outside made the entrance to the river a very chaos of wild waters, and only a daring pilot would venture out.

"You will go out, Master Mark?" asked one of the passengers anxiously.

"Oh, yes, for we can make it."

"Better lie in the river until daylight."

"No, I wish to see what that firing is outside."

So Mark headed on the port tack to run as close under Seguin Island as possible, and then on the starboard tack to push out into the open sea.

The sloop had only storm-sails set, and was all ready for the struggle.

She bounded over the wild waters in splendid style, her topmast housed, and every man at his post.

All realized that it was a dangerous run the young skipper was making, but they had confidence in their commander, and said nothing.

As they shot out from under the shadow of Seguin's Haven cliffs they came in view of a thrilling scene.

There, not a league away, was a sloop-of-war, as her flashing guns showed her to be, flying before a huge line-of-battle ship that was in hot pursuit.

She was English, and kept up a rapid fire from her stern guns, though in that rough sea it was accident if she was able to do any damage to her foe.

The line-of-battle ship was also firing rapidly upon her enemy, and had her in a very perilous position.

She was driving her directly upon a lee-shore, and at one of the most dangerous parts of all that rugged coast.

If she had a pilot, she might run into the Kennebec, where her pursuer dare not follow; but if not, she must go about and surrender, and both beat away from the dread danger they were nearing.

Mark gave the helm to Charcoal and turned his glass upon the pursued and pursuer.

He saw that the British vessel must strike her colors very quickly, if she did not have a pilot on board, or she would be too near to readily beat off from the coast.

"That craft has no pilot, Coal, I am sure, from the way she steers."

"She goin' ter be coctched then, Marse Mark."

"I will signal her and ask if she needs aid."

The lanterns were brought, a rocket was sent up from the sloop, and then the signal was made.

Instantly a reply came that she needed a pilot to save her from the Frenchman.

Mark sprung to the helm and at once put the sloop on her course to cross the bow of the English vessel.

"My God, young man, you will lose your vessel and destroy us all," cried one of the passengers.

"I will risk the loss of the vessel, sir, to save a king's cruiser from capture, or going to pieces on this coast," was the firm reply.

"I cry out against your desperate act, boy, and I will not permit it, for I will see that the passengers do not."

"Hold! if you dare interfere with me, Mr. Patterson, on my own vessel, I will put you in irons and confine you in the hold."

There was no mistaking that Mark meant to do as he said; but the passenger seemed not to fear it.

He was a merchant of wealth in Bath, and a pompous individual, who was feared by those under him as much as a martinet in the army is dreaded by his soldiers.

That any indignity would be offered to him he could not believe, and the other passengers on board hardly thought Mark meant what he said, though his crew knew better.

"You will put me in irons?" cried the merchant, in a furious tone.

"I will, sir, and quickly, unless you go to the cabin and stop interfering with me, for the

safety of all on board shall not be jeopardized by you."

"Hal! you shall see, young man, that Reuben Patterson has his way when he wishes it, and I will at once take charge of this craft myself, you are unfit, as being something of a sailor, and—"

"Charcoal! Buntline! put that gentleman in irons and carry him into the cabin, as I do not wish to open the hatches to send him below."

Mr. Reuben Patterson had not expected such treatment, and was wholly unprepared for it, and, before he knew it, irons were upon his wrists, and, powerless in the grasp of Charcoal and old Buntline, he was hustled below in a jiffy.

If others among the passengers were going to interfere, not relishing Mark's bold act in running under the fire of a ship of-the-line to save the cruiser, the fate of Mr. Patterson deterred them from doing so.

The cruiser was now heading toward the sloop, or in such a way as would bring them near together at the earliest possible moment.

The Frenchman had discovered the Sea-Cat, and expecting a pilot to be on board, to save the chase, opened fire upon the little craft to try and destroy her.

The iron shot fell about her, but none touched her, and seeing that she was rapidly nearing the cruiser, the Frenchman yawed from his course and sent a terrific broadside flying toward the Sea-Cat.

One shot cut through the bulwark, another just chipped the mast, a third carried away the starboard boat and a fourth tore the jib slightly; but not one did material damage, while a score of the deadly missiles flew over and about the little vessel.

But Mark's hand on the tiller never flinched, and he still held on his course.

"You cannot board in this wild sea, Mark," said a passenger, who was watching the bold youth with the deepest interest.

"Yes, sir, I can do so I think."

"But how?"

"I shall drift in my life-boat directly in the course of the cruiser, and let them pick me up as they go by."

"Stand ready, Buntline, to take the tiller, and Charcoal put a red and blue light in either end of the life skiff and made them fast on oars."

With this order Mark relinquished the tiller to old Buntline, with a few low-spoken instructions as to what he wished him to do.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DARING PILOT.

THE negro hastily obeyed the order of his young master, and a red and a blue lantern were hastily but firmly made fast in the bow and stern of the life-boat.

Then Mark sprung into the boat, the crew of the sloop lowered away and the daring young sailor was left dancing in the wake of the Sea-Cat.

The life-boat seemed fairly thrown about upon the waters, from wave to wave; but Mark crouched amidships, and the stanch little shell was not harmed.

The moment that the life-boat was left in the wake of the Sea-Cat, Buntline put the craft on the starboard tack, and then, with only the jib set, wore around before the gale and went flying back toward the mouth of the Kennebec, every light doused on board, that she should no longer be a target for the fire of the large ship-of-war.

As he had calculated, Mark was at once sighted by those on board the cruiser, and the lights being the guide of the commander, the flying vessel was headed toward the boat.

Nearer and nearer it came, while the former kept up his hot fire, and men stood ready with ropes to throw the daring pilot as they swept by.

The commander of the cruiser realized the full danger of the pilot, and the fate of his vessel should accident befall him.

So he steered on a course that would carry him to the life-boat, so that he might luff sharp, leaving it under his lee, and then in that instant the ropes could be thrown and the pilot drawn on board.

He explained to his officers and helmsmen just what he meant to do, and several of the former volunteered to throw the ropes themselves.

The sloop was now nearly half a mile away, Mark saw; as he glanced landward and beheld her indistinctly running for the southerly point of Seguin Island.

The cruiser was almost upon him, and a mile away, still firing, rapidly and viciously, was the line-of-battle ship.

The storm-clouds were black and threatening, the night was dark, and the winds were flying furiously over the wild waters.

His life-boat was half-full of water, but the lanterns still remained lighted in their close cases, and he knew that the next few minutes would tell the success or failure of his bold plan to board the English vessel in the storm and save her.

A moment more and he heard the loud order of the cruiser's commander to his helmsmen.

Then the bows of the cruiser changed their course, the life-boat was under her lee, just as it seemed that she must be run down, and then the boy pilot heard the thrilling words:

"Now cast your lines, and draw that daring pilot on board the vessel he risks his life to save!"

The lines were cast, and Mark grasped one, and almost instantly the life-boat was dragged to the side of the cruiser.

Then willing hands seized him and he was pulled on board, while the vessel, not having lost headway, swept on leaving the life-boat tossing about upon the waves.

The commander had been the first to grasp Mark's hand, and, as the lanterns flashed in the face of the young pilot, he cried:

"Why you are but a boy! but if you have skill equal to your pluck, I have no fear for my vessel."

"I will run her into the Kennebec, sir."

"She is in your hands, my brave lad, and there is hope for us in the moment of despair, for, but for your coming out I should have put back toward my foe and struck my colors."

"Come to the wheel with me, if you dare attempt to run in in such a blow."

"Oh, yes, sir, I can run in without trouble," was the confident reply.

As Mark went aft, he stepped up to the helmsmen and told them how to steer.

The pursuer was now firing more rapidly, and shot were flying about their heads, but none were very disastrous to vessel or crew, as good aim could not be taken.

Mark observed that the cruiser was a fine craft, about a fourth of the size of her pursuer, and that there was a large group of officers in cloaks standing on the quarter-decks.

To one of these the captain said:

"My Lord Admiral, we are in the hands of this brave young pilot now, sir, and I have confidence that he will save us."

"And I, after his daring in boarding as he did."

"Save this vessel from capture, or destruction, my fine fellow, and you shall wear an epaulet," returned the officer who had been dressed as admiral.

Mark's heart bounded with joy, for, unless the cruiser was crippled by the fire of the enemy, he felt no uneasiness as to his not winning the promised prize.

He had brought his own speaking trumpet with him, and it hung by a cord to his belt, and he said quietly:

"It is a bad place, sir, to run into the river, with the wind southeast and blowing a gale, and the tide running out, so I will take a stand in the weather fore rigging, and give my orders how to steer."

"You know best, and I will take the mizzen shrouds to pass your orders to the helmsmen," cried the captain, and he sprung into the position while Mark went forward and took his stand in the foremast shrouds.

Soon came an order from his lips, without the aid of his trumpet, and so clear and ringing was his voice, that the captain did not have to repeat it, the helmsmen hearing distinctly and calling back the command as they obeyed it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WINNING AN EPAULET.

THAT there were most anxious hearts upon the deck of the English vessel-of-war, can well be imagined.

The night was a black one, the waves ran furiously, the winds howled savagely, and astern of them was a huge foe firing upon them with rapidity, and determination to destroy them.

They had sighted that foe early in the night, and the large Frenchman had proven a fast sailer, and held well on to them.

To fight him would have been sheer madness, and there was but one course to pursue—run for it.

The Frenchman was to windward, and a storm coming on, and he cut the English vessel off from escape up or down the coast, and the cruiser could only fly toward the inhospitable shores as though to seek a haven there.

The British vessel was just from England, and her destination was Boston, but a gale had blown her to the northward, and she had no coast pilot on board.

If she could find one, by running in-shore, she could escape her enemy, and her commander headed boldly in, knowing well the danger, but hoping that the Frenchman, believing him to have a pilot, would give up the chase and put away.

On board the British craft was an admiral and his staff, and she further carried a most valuable cargo of small-arms for the troops in the Colonies, so that her loss would be a great one, and her captain was determined to do all in his power to save her from capture, even to risking destruction by wreck.

The coming on board, therefore, of Mark Montague gave hope to hearts that were about despairing.

From his position in the shrouds, Mark kept issuing his orders rapidly, and in a tone that showed he knew the danger of the vessel and expected prompt obedience.

With the wind on her port-quarter, the cruiser flew along, only under her storm-sails.

Then she shot by Seguin, and Mark could nowhere discover the sloop, so knew that Buntline had run her into a haven in the river.

Then the cruiser's bows were round until she was pointed before the gale, and went driving furiously along.

Passing in under the cliffs of Seguin Island, and so close as to cause all on board to hold their breath, her sails caught the gale from starboard, and soon after she went swiftly flying into the river, and all gave a sigh of relief as the daring young pilot sprung from the shrouds and walked aft.

"I will run you up to Bath, sir, if you wish, or to the place where my sloop is anchored, for I am bound to Boston, but, sighting you, went to your aid," said Mark, addressing the captain, who grasped his hand, while he said:

"I am also bound to Boston, my lad, and will be glad to set sail for there to-morrow, if you will put us out to sea again, for I suppose our foe has stood away, now that we are safe."

"But let me say that I owe to you more than I can repay in gratitude, though you have but to name your price as a monetary debt, and it shall be given you."

"I did not serve you for money, sir, but to do my duty, and I will not take pay."

"What is your name, may I ask?"

"Mark Montague, sir."

"You are a dweller on this coast, surely, or you could not do what you have just done?"

"Yes, sir, I was born on the banks of the river."

"A seaman?"

"I am skipper, sir, of a small packet-sloop, plying between this river and Boston."

"You are the master?"

"Yes, sir."

"A youthful captain, surely."

"My father lost his vessel, sir, and an injury deprived him of one of his legs, so that I had to work to support the family."

"Well done, my brave lad," said the admiral, who had stood near and overheard all that had been said.

"Here is the anchorage, sir, so you can let your anchor go," said Mark, as the cruiser swept into a little cove, where the Sea-Cat was already lying.

"And that is your sloop?" asked the captain, when the cruiser had come to an anchor.

"Yes, sir, and I will go on board now, sir, if you please."

"But I wish to run out with the dawn, my fine fellow."

"Well, sir, I will come on board and pilot you out then."

"And I will have the price of your life boat ready for you, as it was lost for us, and you must let me pay for it."

"Thank you, sir, and, as I am not very rich, I will allow you to do that."

"And you will not accept a reward for your gallant services in money?"

"No, sir, under no consideration," and Mark hailed the sloop and told Charcoal to come for him.

Soon after he went on board the sloop, and as he left the side of the cruiser the crew gave him a tremendous cheer.

Upon reaching the Sea-Cat old Buntline said with enthusiasm:

"That was the grandest act I ever seen done, Master Mark, and no man that I know would ever have tried it."

"You should have a commission for saving that king's craft."

"I hope to get a middy's berth, good Buntline, though humanity as well as ambition prompted the act."

"Now go down and bring Mr. Patterson on deck."

"Oh! but he is mad."

"I do not care, for he should know that two men can never command one craft."

In a few moments Buntline came on deck, accompanied by the irate merchant.

"Boy, you have done that this night which will cost you dear," cried Reuben Patterson.

"Mr. Patterson, I but did my duty, and that which I would do with any man who interfered with me in my duty."

"I sent for you to release you of your irons, and to say that if you did not care to continue on in my vessel, I will have Charcoal take you up to Bath."

"If you remain, sir, you have got to understand that I will allow no interference."

The merchant quailed before the determined air of the boy.

He knew that the cruiser had been saved by Mark's courage alone, and he felt assured that he would not put up with his insults.

He was anxious to reach Boston in haste, and he knew of no quicker way of going than in the sloop.

So he said:

"I can only do as you demand, young man, as you hold the power to force me to do as you wish."

"I will go on in the schooner, which you can sail to suit yourself; but I will not forget the insult and humiliation you have put upon me tonight."

"I do not ask you to forgive or forget, Mr. Patterson, if you prefer to bear malice."

"But you should understand that I am responsible for my vessel, and let me do my own way."

"Buntline, take off the irons from Mr. Patterson."

The order was obeyed and then Mark sought his berth, for he was wet and tired after what he had passed through.

With the early dawn he awoke, and soon after went on board the cruiser.

The sea was running high, there was still a stiff breeze, but the storm had blown itself out.

The captain of the war-vessel invited him to join him at an early breakfast, and then the cruiser got under way, with Mark at the helm, and passed safely out to sea, the Sea-Cat following in her wake.

The French vessel was nowhere visible, and the course was ordered to be laid for Boston, as soon as the young pilot should go on board his sloop.

The Sea-Cat then ran near and lay to, while the life-boat was lowered from the cruiser, and all was ready to take Mark on board his craft, when the admiral appeared on deck.

"My brave youth, I desire to hand you this paper, which makes you a midshipman in the king's navy, for the services you have rendered."

As he spoke he handed to Mark an official-looking document.

Mark was deeply moved, but said, as he raised his cap:

"I am glad, sir, to feel that you deem me worthy of the honor you bestow, and I hope to prove your confidence has not been misplaced."

"I thank you, sir, and you also, Captain Vane," and he turned to the commander of the vessel, who said promptly, addressing an officer near:

"Mr. Roe, give this young officer a salute with the guns, as he leaves the ship."

As the guns roared forth in his honor, Mark Montague's heart swelled with pride, and his eyes flashed as he boarded his sloop.

"Very fine, very fine, boy, but I won't forget you," sneered Reuben Patterson.

But Mark heeded not his words, and dipping his flag to the cruiser he held on his way, taking the tiller himself, for once more he was "Skipper Mark," though he had won an epaulet.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARK MAKES A VISIT.

THE first thing that Mark Montague did, upon his arrival in Portland, was to write a letter to his father, to send back by stage, telling of his prospects for the future.

Then, after touching at Portsmouth, he ran for Boston, making a very quick voyage of it.

The British cruiser was already in port, and the news of her having been saved by the young

skipper of the Sea-Cat, gained for him a grand reception as the pretty sloop swept into the harbor and alongside of her wharf.

Mr. Patterson went ashore, grim and threatening, saying that he would return by another packet, or by stage, and was glad to wipe the dust of the Sea-Cat from his feet.

He threatened all sorts of things, but Mark seemed wholly indifferent to them.

Having attended to his duties as master of a vessel, Mark dressed himself in his best and went up to see the naval representative of the king, carrying with him the official document which the admiral had given him.

That distinguished personage happened to be at that time visiting the port admiral when Mark's name was brought in.

"It's the very youth I was telling you about, commodore," said the admiral.

"I will have him come in at once, for I have a curiosity to see the plucky fellow."

"He is a Yankee of course."

"Without doubt."

"I wish our English youths were more ready to distinguish themselves, than they are, for these Yankees go right ahead of them."

"Why I could fill our ships with these American lads as middies, if I took them on pluck and skill alone."

"But it is a dangerous precedent to set, for I tell you, my lord, there is sure to be war between this land and the mother country, and we don't wish to nurse in our navy too many young vipers to sting us, for all will go with their loved Yankee land."

"I think you are right, commodore, and I fear me there will be trouble soon."

"But this lad saved a cruiser for his Majesty, either from capture or destruction, and he deserves the berth I gave him."

"Most surely, my lord—ah! here he is."

Mark just then entered and the admiral greeted him kindly, presenting him to the commodore.

"I have heard of you before, Master Montague, for you are the daring young fellow who fought off the freebooter Caspar, when he attempted to take your vessel."

"Yes, sir, I happened to have on board a lot of arms for the fort on the Kennebec, and so made use of them."

"But for that, sir, I would have lost my vessel," modestly replied Mark.

"No, sir, you would not, I am sure, for you had the nerve to defend her, and I learn that your own rifle, which you went alight to fire, picked off the helmsman of the pirate, and thus you saved your craft, while your freight, in making a barrier astern protected your people."

"I have reported it, Master Montague, and am happy to congratulate you upon your latter achievement in which you saved the admiral here, and his vessel."

"Thank you, sir, but that was my luck in happening out to sea that night."

"You are modest, my lad; but I wish some of our young officers had your luck, as you call it."

"Now tell me, was not your name in the papers about a year ago, regarding the loss of your father's vessel, and you putting down a mutiny?"

"Well, sir, we lost our crew from fever, in the West Indies, and shipped strange men, who it seems wanted to seize the schooner and sell her to a pirate chief."

"I overheard their plot, so was able to counteract it, that was all, sir."

"Now, admiral, let me beg you to note the extreme modesty of this young skipper, for here is the report of the affair, taken down by one of my officers from the lips of this youth's father."

"I will read it to you," and the commodore read the statement of Henri Montague, Kennebec, skipper of merchant schooner, of the whole affair when he lost his vessel, and the part that Mark had played in it.

"Why, my dear lad, that alone should have gotten you a middy's berth in the king's navy, while certainly the saving of your sloop when attacked was another deed worthy of an epaulet."

"Now this third affair, where I owe you so much of gratitude, proves that you do not intend to remain at a standstill, but push on up the ladder of promotion," said the admiral.

"I hope to deserve promotion, sir, for I am ambitious to rise."

"Well said, but suppose your land has war with the mother country, and you are an officer under the king?" and the admiral and commodore looked fixedly at the youth.

Mark dropped his eyes for an instant, and his face flushed.

Then he looked up and said boldly:

"I was born in America, sir, and if our people went to war against the English, I would resign from the king's navy and offer my services to the American Government."

There was silence for a moment, and the commodore and admiral looked at each other.

Then the latter said:

"My boy, I pray there will be no war, but I honor you for your frank speech, and I wish you every success as an officer of the king."

"Thank you, sir; but I came to see the commodore and ask him about the time I should report for duty, sir, as you gave me no orders."

"Whenever you wish, Master Montague," said the commodore.

"I am the only support of my parents and sister, sir, and I am anxious to leave the little sloop in competent hands to still earn a living for them, while I wished to say that I thought it possible to render a service in the Sea-Cat, before I gave her up, for I formed a little plot I would like to make known to you, sir, with your permission."

"Out with it, Midshipman Montague, and I warrant me you have a daring plot formed in that busy brain of yours," said the commodore, his interest in the handsome, fearless youth increasing each moment.

CHAPTER XX.

THE STRANGE PASSENGER.

THE Sea-Cat was about ready to sail from Boston Harbor when a man with gray beard and bushy hair came down to the wharf and asked if he could get passage to Portsmouth.

"Yes, I can give you a berth," said Mark, and he eyed the man closely.

"And how long will you be in Portsmouth?" was asked.

"A few hours, perhaps."

"Suppose I wanted to go on then to Portland, could I get a berth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you will not be crowded with passengers?"

"No."

"How many have you now?"

"I think twelve."

"All men?"

"No, I have four male passengers, the rest are females."

"Well, cap'n, I'll run up for my carpet-bag and join you, if you can wait half an hour."

"I will not sail for nearly an hour, sir, so you will have time," was Mark's response, and the man turned away.

"Chips, follow that man and see what he does, but do not let him see you," said Mark to one of his crew, a lad with a freckled face full of mischief and cunning.

Chips darted away and half an hour after the man returned.

He carried in his hands a small carpet-sack and a box, and was shown his berth by Charcoal.

The Sea-Cat was now ready to sail, but Mark waited, for Chips had not returned.

Soon he came running down to the wharf and sprung on board.

"Well, Chips?" asked Mark, as he left the tiller to Buntline and went forward to where the lad was winding the jib halyard.

"There was two fellers awaitin' him round the corner, skipper, and I passed 'em by slow like and heerd him say:

"He hes got but four men passengers on board, 'sides his crew, and I goes to Portsmouth in her."

"Thar I kin tell yer all, for I'll run down in a small boat and jine yer off the Isle of Shoals, and you kin then lay for her off Portland, whar be will put in, and she's yours."

"Aha, you heard all this, Chips?"

"Yes, skipper, for I jist passed 'em slow, and then went around the corner and stopped."

"But there's more to tell."

"Well, Chips?"

"Them two men as he talked to walked off rapid like, and somehow I missed seeing where the man you told me to foller went."

"But I followed them, and they went down to a schooner half a mile below, and, Skipper Mark, if it hain't the Shark in disguise, as a coaster, I'll live without eatin'."

Mark smiled, and to the surprise of Chips, said simply:

"I thought so."

"Now, Chips, keep your eye on that man during the voyage, but do not let him suspect you."

"Not me, skipper, I kin see and not be seen."

The strange passenger made himself most agreeable as the Sea-Cat sailed out of the har-

bor, but Mark saw that he kept looking back toward the city.

As the Sea-Cat got out into open water, and lay on her course along the coast, the young skipper took his glass and made a clean sweep of the horizon.

Then he glanced astern, and beheld just what he had expected, a schooner in his wake, though two leagues away.

He also saw that the strange passenger was gazing at her, and there appeared to be a look of satisfaction upon his face.

Mark, seeing him a moment after standing near, said casually:

"I am glad to see there are no suspicious vessels around, for I have a most valuable cargo on board."

"It's a trifle risky these days taking valuable cargoes, skipper," returned the man.

"Yes, but I think we shall get through all right."

"I hope so, for you could not make a fight, if you were to see a foe."

"Oh, yes, for I have six men in my crew, and the male passengers, which would make us about a dozen, to fight off a coast pirate."

"Not enough."

"I fought off Caspar the Corsair once."

"I heard about that; but I hear he has armed his schooner now, and has two-score men."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and he threatens to put the skipper and his crew who resist him, instantly to death."

"It is catching before hanging."

"Yes; but his schooner is very fast."

"So I know; but this sloop is too."

"Well, I hope you'll have no trouble, young skipper."

"I hope not, surely, for we could not resist such a force as you say Caspar has now."

"But how did you learn this?"

"From some seamen at the inn where I stopped."

"They said he had chased them into port."

"And his vessel is armed?"

"Yes, he's got a twelve-pounder pivot-gun, I hear, and five sixes, two to a broadside, and one astern."

"He is well armed then, and I shall have to keep a bright lookout."

"You'll have nothing to fear after leaving Portsmouth."

"How is that?"

"He cruises south of Portsmouth."

"I have heard of him north of the Penobscot."

"Oh, yes, but that was in his smuggling times; but now he has taken to pirating he wants to keep near the big forts."

"You seem well informed regarding his movements."

The man's face flushed, and he eyed Mark attentively.

But Mark seemed only to have dealt a shot at random, and the man replied:

"Well, I travel a great deal between Portland and Boston, and my business causes me to carry a large sum of money, so I am particular to learn all I can about the freebooters' movements, so as not to be caught."

"It was because I knew your craft was fast, and you had the pluck to defend her, I came with you, and I tell you, skipper, I've got considerable money with me now."

"I think you will get through all safe, sir," Mark replied, and then turned away, while he muttered to himself:

"I cannot be mistaken, for his hair and beard are false, and I have seen him before."

"So be it, we will see who is caught napping."

CHAPTER XXI.

A LAMB IN WOLF'S CLOTHING.

It was in the afternoon when the Sea-Cat ran into the harbor of Portsmouth.

The strange passenger left her there, seeming very glad to have gotten to port in safety, and he shook hands warmly with Mark at parting.

"See where he goes, Chips," said Mark.

Just before the hour of sailing, Chips came on board.

"Well?"

"He went to the upper wharfs, and I saw him talking to a man who owns a small sail-boat."

"And that was all?"

"No, Skipper Mark, for after he left I went to the man and asked him if he could hire his boat for to-night, and he said it was let."

"I then told him I would pay a big price to get it, and he said he'd get a good price for it anyhow."

"Then I kinder talked round about, and

found he had let it to a gent who wanted to join a craft off the Isle o' Shoals."

"That settles it, Chips, the man is just what I suspected him to be."

"A pirit?"

"About as bad, I guess."

"Waal, Skipper Mark, it's a pity we let him go."

"We will see him again, Chips."

"Whar?"

"When we come out of Portland Harbor."

"I declar', I believe you is hatchin' out some leetle game, skipper."

Mark laughed and Chips muttered:

"Things looks a leetle cur'ous, fer I find that thar wasn't a passenger took for beyond Portland."

"I'm goin' ter keep my eyes open, for Skipper Mark is up tu some game, that's certain."

It was daylight also when the Sea-Cat went into Portland Harbor, and there the passengers all left the craft, not one being on board whose destination was beyond.

There were some who came down to the wharf to take passage for Portland, but Chips looked positively amazed when Mark said quietly:

"Our passenger list is filled up."

"Is there not a single berth left?" asked an old gentleman.

"Not one, sir; in fact I will have more on board than I can accommodate in the cabin," answered Mark.

"Sakes alive! Has Master Mark taken to lyin' like that?" muttered Chips, and he looked at his young commander in surprise.

"Buntline!" called out Mark.

"Yes, sir."

"Get under way soon after dark, and come to when you reach the outer harbor, for I will join you there."

Buntline looked surprised, but said nothing more than to acquiesce, while Mark continued:

"Say to all who may come that the passenger list is full, and take no one."

"If any one asks for me say that I am unable to see them, and let no one come on board."

"Yes, sir."

"But do not sail until after nightfall."

"All right, Master Mark."

Mark then walked up into the town and disappeared from the anxious eyes of Chips, who was watching him and wondering.

It was just after nightfall when the Sea-Cat left her wharf and headed out of Portland Harbor.

As she glided along under easy sail, Buntline was at the tiller, and he and Charcoal were talking together in a low tone.

What it meant that the young skipper should refuse passengers, and sail with an empty cabin they did not know, but both felt that Mark was playing some bold game.

"We'll know when he comes on board, Coal; here we are, off the fort, and I'll anchor, as the tide is running in hard."

So the anchor was let fall and the Sea-Cat lay quietly upon the waters.

Half an hour passed and then a boat was seen approaching.

"It's full of men," said Charcoal, and Buntline hailed, somewhat anxiously:

"Boat, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, Buntline!"

"It was Skipper Mark's voice," said the old man.

"Yas, and dere comes another boat, and it's full o' men, too," Charcoal said.

"And the e's another boat," chimed in Chips.

The first boat now ran alongside, and Mark sprung on board, followed by a dozen soldiers, to the amazement of the Sea-Cat's crew.

The two other boats soon after ran alongside, and other soldiers came on board, until half a hundred men were on the sloop's deck.

Nearly all of these were now crowded down into the cabin, while the boats, with an oarsman in each, put back for the fort.

The anchor was then gotten up, and a couple of officers and half a dozen men put on tarpaulins and pea-jackets to hide their uniforms, for they remained upon deck, and the moon, just on the wane, was rising out of the sea.

As the Sea-Cat began to glide seaward, the hatches were open, and out of the hold were taken four large boxes that had been marked as merchandise, as shipped to a merchant in Bath.

These boxes were quickly opened by the soldiers, and found to be two twelve-pound cannon and gun-carriages.

With the force on board the guns were quickly mounted, ports were cut forward in the bulwarks and amidships, so that they could be used in different parts of the sloop, and then canvas concealed the apertures.

The guns were also hidden under canvas coverings, and a crew of six men was detailed for each gun, from the artillery soldiers on board, and placed under command of a young officer.

The remainder of the soldiers were marines, loaned also from the fort, and their commander was a young subaltern, the two officers being under the command of Mark Montague.

The sloop had now gained an offing, and the soldiers were kept in hiding once more.

Mark went aloft with his glass, and swept the horizon carefully.

Not a sail was in sight.

Then he closely searched the coast, and beheld, lying under bare poles, and close in under the shadow of an island, a small schooner.

"It is the Shark, and as soon as we pass her, so that she can cut us off from Portland, she will set sail and give chase," said Mark to the two officers.

"And Captain Caspar will be considerably surprised to find that he has caught a lamb in the clothing of a wolf," said one of the officers, laughing.

"Yes," added the other. "This is a lamb with claws."

CHAPTER XXII.

CLIPPING A TIGER WOLF'S CLAWS.

JUST as Mark had said, as the Sea-Cat glided past the schooner lying close in shore, and which was without doubt striving to remain hidden, those on board the sloop who were watching her, beheld her canvas going up.

Ten minutes after she shot out from the land under all sail, and began a chase of the sloop.

Not a stitch of extra canvas was set on the Sea-Cat, which was under easy sail, and the schooner gained rapidly.

Standing on the quarter-deck of the schooner were two persons, one of them Captain Caspar, the other a man whom the reader has met before, for it was none other than Carl Kent, the mutineer, who had sprung overboard from the life-boat, the night he had attempted to take the lives of the wounded skipper, Mark and Charcoal.

The schooner had really been armed, as the strange passenger had reported to Mark, for she carried six guns, the one forward being a twelve-pounder mounted upon a pivot.

Her crew combined of forty men, and they were all well armed.

Before the sailing of the Sea-Cat from Boston Carl Dent, who had been living there at a seaman's inn, since his escape, had fallen in with a man to whom he was introduced by the landlord, as Captain Caspar.

Knowing that the landlord was a person who could not boast a clear record, Carl Dent had told him frankly that he was anxious to get into some berth that would pay well, even if it was piracy.

The landlord happened to be the agent for the sale of Captain Caspar's booty, and thus brought them together, for the freebooter often ran into port boldly in his schooner, disguising her as a coast trader.

The very day that Carl Dent met Captain Caspar he came upon Mark Montague on the street, and quickly turned aside before he was recognized.

He knew of the unsuccessful attempt of Caspar to capture the Sea-Cat, and so he proposed a plan by which he could do so.

He told Captain Caspar of the mutiny on Captain Montague's schooner, and how he had been forced to spring out of the life-boat to save his life, and had reached the shore after a desperate struggle.

"That boy kept me out of a fortune, and I want his life.

"I'll plan to catch his vessel, and I ask no reward, only that you will hang him.

"Then if you wish to give me a mate's berth with you, I'll be more than willing."

So he said to Caspar, who readily agreed, for he was anxious to capture the Sea-Cat for his own use, outside of the value of her cargo.

As to hanging Mark he did not intend to do so, though he led the mutineer to believe that he would.

"The boy is plucky, and has only done his duty in defending his craft, so I'll let him go," he said to himself.

So Carl Dent played his part well, going on the Sea-Cat as the "strange passenger," finding out just what force Mark had, and the value of the cargo, and leaving the sloop at Portsmouth.

There he ran out in a sail-boat, and joined the Shark off the Isle of Shoals, and the pirate craft

then headed for the coast beyond Portland to lie in wait for her victim.

As the sloop passed on and did not show any desire to increase her speed, Captain Caspar remarked:

"They could not see us lying in there under bare poles, and have not yet discovered us."

"So it seems, and we are gaining rapidly," responded Dent.

"I am glad of it, for we will get within easy range, and can bring her to, if we cannot overhaul her without, for that sloop sails fast, Dent."

"I don't doubt it, for you are under full sail and do not gain as fast as I thought you would — there! he has sighted you!"

"Too bad."

This remark was caused by seeing a show of excitement on the sloop.

An extra jib was set, the topsail was run up and the huge mainsail trimmed more closely.

The effect of this extra canvas was to send the Sea-Cat along at a pace that caused Mark to see that they were gaining on the schooner slightly.

"Drag the anchor forward, Buntline, for if we gain they will open fire, and I don't wish the Sea-Cat hurt."

The dropping of the anchor forward, just below the cutwater, caused the headway to be deadened, and the schooner was soon seen to be gaining.

As she drew nearer, she suddenly fired a shot over the sloop, as a command to come to; but Mark held quietly on.

Another shot was then fired, but far over the decks.

"Captain Caspar does not wish to harm the Sea-Cat, feeling sure of her," said Mark.

Other shots were fired, but none came very near the sloop, and it was very evident were intended to frighten the crew and not to hurt the vessel.

Then the schooner ceased firing, and began to rapidly gain on the sloop.

The soldiers still remained in the cabin, but the guns were loaded with grape, and the muskets were charged, so all was in readiness to act, when Mark gave the word of command.

The wind was not very strong, hardly more than a six-knot breeze, and as the schooner came nearer Mark hailed:

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the Sea-Cat!"

"Why are you firing on me?"

"To force your surrender, for I claim you as my prize."

"I waru you off, for I shall defend my sloop."

"It is madness, for I know your force, and I have half a hundred men."

"I shall fight you."

"It will be the worse for you, boy."

"Fire!" shouted Mark, and half a dozen muskets rattled forth as a blind.

"Drop down, all of you!"

With the order of Mark all on the sloop did so, while a shower of bullets went flying over the deck.

"Now get that anchor up in place, Buntline, and then you take the helm."

This order was quickly obeyed, and as Buntline came back to the tiller, the schooner was not a cable's length away.

"To your posts, for I shall go about," said Mark.

A moment after came the command:

"Ready, about!"

As the sloop swept up into the wind, those on the schooner seemed to feel that she was doing so to come to, and the latter vessel sailed so as to run alongside.

But out of the cabin, at the low command of Mark Montague, came the gunners, and behind them were the marines, their muskets in their hands.

The gun to starboard was stripped of its canvas, the muzzle run through the hole in the bulwark, and then came the command:

"Fire!"

Hardly had the cannon sent its shower of grape-shot upon the schooner's deck, when again came the order:

"Marines, attention!

"Fire!"

Then there flashed out thirty muskets, and the leaden hail was poured upon the pirates.

The helmsman of the schooner was killed, the crew were utterly demoralized, for a dozen of their number were killed or wounded, and the Shark lay almost helpless upon the waters, for no longer held upon her course, she had swept up quickly into the wind.

The wolf's claws had been clipped by the lamb.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MIDDY'S PRIZE.

So thoroughly bewildered were the crew of the schooner, at the unexpected turn affairs had taken, that they were powerless to move.

The deck of the schooner was strewn with dead and wounded, for the fire of grape and musket balls had played sad havoc, and there seemed no one to spring to the helm and keep the vessel on her way.

The captain was as much amazed as his men, and for the first time in his life he was wholly taken aback.

He saw that he had been caught in a trap of his own setting, and how to extricate himself he did not know.

That the sloop was armed he well knew, for she had shown her teeth in a most vicious manner, and that there was a large force on board the moonlight plainly revealed to him.

He turned to his ally in his distress.

That worthy, Carl Dent, was standing like one dazed, and he saw that he knew no more what to do than he did.

So in his desperation Captain Caspar shouted:

"Fire on them!"

Some of the pirates fired a few scattering shots. But the sloop was coming back to attack the schooner, and the latter was now at her mercy, for his men could not be rallied to the attack, he well knew.

Turning to Carl Dent, the captain said in a low tone:

"You are a good swimmer?"

"Yes, how far is it to the land?"

"An island is not a mile away, and the tide runs in."

"Then it is a short swim to other islands."

"Let us go."

"To stay here is to be hanged."

"Yes."

"Then we will risk a swim."

"All of us?"

"Oh, no."

"All right. I am ready."

"I will soon be."

With this Captain Caspar was about to dart into the cabin, when a second fire from the sloop brought down several of his crew, and loud rung out the cry for quarter.

"There is my fortune in that cabin," cried Caspar.

"Life is dearer," said Carl Dent.

"Yes."

"Then let us go."

They slipped to the side and went over.

Hardly had they gotten into the sea, when the sloop ran alongside of the schooner.

Grapnels were cast, and the two vessels were made fast together, while Mark Montague led his men on the deck of the Shark.

But there was no resistance, and the schooner was a prize to the young midshipman.

To secure the prisoners was but the work of a few minutes, and then came the query as to what had become of Captain Caspar.

No one had seen him go overboard, or if any of his men had, they did not say so.

The schooner was searched, but the captain was not found.

The carpet-bag and box, belonging to his strange passenger was discovered and recognized by Mark Montague, while inquiry of the pirates brought forth the information that there had been a strange man come off and join the schooner near the Isle of Shoals.

And what Mark was most surprised at, was that some papers among the stranger's things bore the name

"KARL DENT."

"That is the name of our mutineer sailor, Charcoal, and after all he escaped that night, and now I know that I was right in feeling that I had seen that strange passenger before."

"Yes, Marse Mark, I knows him now, sah."

"But whar is he?"

"He has doubtless gone ashore, for the swim is not so long a one as he took before."

"And the cap'n has gone with him, sah?"

"Doubtless, Charcoal."

"I might take a boat, sah, and a couple of men, and land on the island yonder, to look 'em up."

"Do so, Coal, and I will send half a dozen men along."

But the search of the island was useless, for the two men could not be found, and so the two vessels got under way once more and stood back for Portland, where the Shark was turned over to the proper authorities, along with the prisoners, while the sloop went on her way to the Kennebec.

But before leaving port Mark discovered

what a valuable prize he had captured, as he had found the hold of the schooner stored with a rich cargo of booty that would bring in a snug little sum of prize money.

Arriving at Bath Mark found that the stagecoach was ahead of him, with the news of his capture, and the whole town turned out to welcome the young hero.

No, not the whole town, for Mr. Reuben Patterson had a quota of friends who were most bitter at the treatment he had received at the hands of the young middy.

Whether they rejoiced in secret at what the merchant had suffered, they were sycophants, and publicly spoke most bitterly of Mark Montague, and threats were made to have him dismissed from the king's navy, or rather to prevent him from entering upon his duties as a midshipman.

But Mark cared little for their threats, and went on in the even tenor of his way.

He had made up his mind that he would remain at home for a short while, as he intended to enter the navy, and Buntline was given the charge of the sloop as skipper.

Several days after her arrival in port, the Sea-Cat set sail for her usual voyage, Old Buntline vastly proud of his promotion, and Mark remained at home.

But he had written a report of his capture of the Shark to the commodore, and stated that the prize was in Portland Harbor, subject to his orders, and with a guard of soldiers on board.

He also stated that after a stay at home of a month, he would come to Boston and report for duty.

This letter he had given Chips to deliver in person to the commodore, and then he had settled down, after the Sea-Cat sailed, to a life of quiet rest, for the time he would be with his loved parents and sister.

But that night, shortly after midnight, a tap came upon his window and awakened him.

Going to it he recognized in the moonlight none other than Chips.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAPTURE.

WHEN Mark looked out of his window, he saw that Chips was bareheaded and looked in distress.

A few hours before the boy had sailed in the sloop, so why was he back there at night?

Raising the window, he said softly:

"I'll be right out, Chips."

He did not wish to alarm his mother or sister, and so quietly dressed and sprung out of the window.

The two walked away from the cabin, and Chips said quickly:

"The Sea-Cat is gone!"

"What do you mean?"

"She's captured."

"The sloop has been captured?"

"Fact!"

"Who by?"

"Captain Caspar."

"Tell me about it, Chips."

"It was off Seguin."

"Well?"

"We was sailin' along quiet, when all of a sudden out come two boats right onto us."

"Well?"

"They was under the land close, so we didn't see 'em, and if we had, we couldn't have done nothin'."

"And they captured the sloop?"

"Sure."

"It was Captain Caspar?"

"Yes; and the wind was light, so we couldn't have got away."

"And then?"

"Skipper Buntline was at the helm, proud as a peacock, Charcoal was asleep, and t'others of the crew 'way forward, while I was in the caboose tryin' to steal somethin' to eat."

"We had no passengers, as you knows, and there was no shootin'."

"Did they hail you?"

"No; and we didn't see 'em until they rowed out of the shadde of Seguin Island."

"Their oars was muffled, and they rowed right aboard, one boat on each side."

"How many men?"

"About twenty."

"What then?"

"They just seized the sloop, and one said he were Cap'n Caspar, and he guess the sloop would do to start life in ag'in."

"And Buntline, Charcoal, and the others?"

"Was made prisoners."

"And you?"

"I didn't leave the caboose, and I seen it all. Then, when nobody were lookin', I jist

slipped over the side and swum fer the island, and then to ther main shore, and I comed on foot up to see you."

"They did not see you, then?"

"No."

"Which way did the sloop head?"

"To Portland, for Cap'n Caspar said he meant to capture back his schooner, and have both vessels."

"Chips?" cried Mark, suddenly.

"Yes, sir."

"You know how to hitch up a horse, so go to the barn and put Trot to the wagon, while I wake father and mother up."

"Then we will go to Bath, get a good team, and drive to Portland with all speed."

"I'm with yer, skipper," said Chips, and he darted off to the barn.

In a few moments Mark had told his surprised parents all that had occurred, while Mrs. Montague hastily prepared some supper for Chips.

Then the two sprung into the wagon with Captain Montague, who was to drive them to the town.

Half an hour after Mark and Chips were on the road to Portland, and they kept the horses going at a lively pace.

Three times did Mark change his horses on the way, as he drove hard, and he anxiously watched the skies and the wind.

"I don't like this fine breeze, Chips, for it is just in their favor, and they will come along the coast with a cap full, and be ahead of us I fear."

"But they wouldn't go inter port in daytime, skipper."

"I should think not, and they cannot know of your escape, and therefore do not expect any alarm to be given."

"No, they will hardly attempt to cut the schooner out before night."

So Mark said, and so he hoped.

But his heart sunk within him, when he arrived in Portland, to discover the sloop and the schooner in the offing, and sailing side by side for the open sea.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PIRATE'S TRIUMPH.

THE springing into the sea, from the schooner, of Captain Caspar and Carl Dent, had not been observed by any of the pirate crew, in the intense excitement on board, and they struck manfully out for the shore.

Both were splendid swimmers, the tide was in their favor, and they reached the nearest island without very great fatigue.

They had not been long there, when Captain Caspar said:

"When they miss us, do you not think they will search for us here?"

"It would be just like that boy to do so."

"Then let us push for another island."

"If there was some fisherman's hut near, where we could get a boat, we would be all right."

"There is, a few miles up Casco Bay."

"We can get there?"

"Yes, come on."

Into the water they went again, and from island to island they made their way, until at last, utterly prostrated they reached the mainland.

There they lay upon the shore until they were able to travel, and slowly they went along until they came in sight of the cabin.

It was late in the afternoon and they were very hungry and wretched.

The fisherman was away from home, his wife said, had gone to the town for supplies, and would not return until the next day.

They told her that they were shipwrecked, and she gave them food, and then they lay down to sleep.

It was night when she awoke them, having a hot supper prepared, which they ate of heartily, and then saying that they would start for Portland they bade her good-by.

When they saw the light put out in the humble cabin home they crept back to the shore and took the skiff belonging to the fisherman.

"I knew she would not sell it, so did not ask her; but this is double the price of it," said Captain Caspar, and he stuck an oar in the sand, tying to it his handkerchief, in which there were a half a dozen gold pieces.

"You are a fool to throw your money away, for we have the skiff," said Carl Dent.

"I'm a pirate, yes, and a very bad man; but I wouldn't be so mean as to rob that poor fisherman's wife," was the answer.

Getting into the skiff they set the tiny sail, and Captain Caspar taking the helm they started on their voyage.

Their course lay down the coast, and the pirate captain knew just where he was going.

Their voyage was not a quick one; but they arrived after forty-eight hours in the Kennebec, and the skiff was run ashore at a point near the rendezvous which had been agreed upon between Captain Caspar and his mysterious Spy in Bath, as a place where letters could be left.

It was early in the afternoon when they reached there.

As the pirate reached the spot he came suddenly upon a horseman.

Both men started, and then the pirate said:

"It is a godsend to meet you, sir."

"You are Caspar the Corsair," said the horseman.

"I am, and I know you, for I dogged your steps that night of our meeting and found out who you were."

"Nay, put on no airs, for I am a desperate man, and I need your aid, and I can enrich you if you will help me now."

"I heard you were dead."

"Oh, no, the rumor was false, as you see."

"Your vessel was taken?"

"Oh, yes, but I escaped by swimming ashore, and I have a comrade with me."

"He lies yonder in the skiff, utterly worn out, as I am, while we are half-famished."

"I left a letter here for you some days ago, and, hearing you were supposed to be drowned, I came here to get it."

"How strange that we should meet here!"

"I came to leave a communication here for you, to get you to help me start once more."

"I have my ink-horn and quill with me, as you see, so meant to leave a letter, saying where you could find me."

"I do not know what I can do for you."

"Much."

"What?"

"First, go and get us some food, and covering, and when we are comfortable we can talk together."

"I do not wish your comrade to see me."

"As you please; he need not."

"I will meet you here within two hours, say."

"I can be back sooner," and the horseman rode away.

Captain Caspar then went after Carl Dent, and hiding the skiff the two sought a place of refuge in a pine thicket among the hills.

"Wait here, Dent, for I know where I can get food," said Captain Caspar, and he departed, leaving Carl Dent, who was very weary, lying upon the pine straw.

He had not waited long at the rendezvous, when the horseman returned.

His horse was covered with foam, showing that he had ridden hard.

"I went to a farm up in the hills and got you this food, and here are comforters for you to sleep on and cover with to-night."

"You are kind; but now tell me if the sloop is in port."

"The Sea-Cat?"

"Yes."

"She is."

"When does she sail?"

"Day after to-morrow is her day."

"I wish to seize her."

"How can you?"

"You must help me."

"I cannot."

"Do you know Dick Stebbins of the Ocean Inn?"

"Yes."

"Deliver him the note which I will write, and hand him for me a thousand pounds."

"I have not the money."

"Get it then."

"I cannot."

"You can and you must."

"I do not wish Stebbins to know that I am your—your—"

"Call it mate, as you fear to call a pirate your friend."

"Well, have it so."

"You can go to Stebbins's place and call him out in the dark."

"Disguise yourself so that he will not know you, and hand him the note and the money."

"I have not got the money."

"You must get it, or I will tell what I know, while if you do as I ask, I will make you partner of one-third in my prizes."

"What is your plan?"

"I will write Stebbins to get me a dozen good men, have them come down in two boats to this place the night before the sloop sails and meet me."

"Stebbins knows me, so understands what men I wish, and will get me those I can trust."

"They must all be armed, and bring along a

couple of spare belts of arms for my mate and myself."

"You intend to seize the sloop?"

"Yes, and then with her to take my schooner, wherever she may be."

"She is at Portland."

"Good! with the sloop and the schooner I will have just what I intended to get, so will be well off."

"Now I will write the letter."

It was written and given to the horseman, who started off with it, while Captain Caspar, to the delight of Carl Dent, soon appeared in the thicket with plenty of food and covering.

The night after the sloop was captured, as the reader knows, and so far the pirate had triumphed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN CASPAR'S RUSE.

WHEN Mark Montague arrived in sight of the harbor of Portland, and beheld his own sloop and the schooner, sailing swiftly away, he was deeply chagrined.

Of course there could be but one solution to it, and that was that the pirate had gotten ahead of him.

But then how was it that the outlaw had been enabled, in broad daylight, to take the schooner out of her harbor?

That was the mystery.

There seemed to be no excitement in the town, or at the port.

But, as there was only one way to solve the mystery Mark took that way.

He went to the fort.

He was sent by the commandant, to whom he had appealed before for men, when he had carried a letter from the commodore to him.

As the reader has surmised, Mark had suggested to the commodore a way that he could capture the Shark and her crew, and he had successfully carried it out.

To have his success shadowed by the capture of his sloop, and the recapture of the schooner was a bitter blow to Mark.

But he did not despair, and when he met the commander of the fort he said quickly:

"The schooner has gone, sir, I see?"

"Oh, yes, and I supposed you were with her, Midshipman Montague."

"Oh, no, sir, for I just drove here with all haste, from Bath, to tell you that my sloop had been captured by Caspar the Corsair, and—"

"What?" cried the commander in alarm.

"The Sea-Cat sailed last night, sir, from the Kennebec, under command of my former mate.

"This youth was on board, and says that she was boarded off Seguin by two boats filled with men, under Captain Caspar.

"Chips here escaped, came to my house, and we drove here in all haste, hoping to head the Corsair off, for he said he was coming here to recapture his schooner."

"And by Neptune's beard he has done it."

"See here, Montague, I saw the sloop run in and anchor."

"She dropped anchor not far from the schooner, and a boat came off, and a man landed here at the fort."

"He brought me this letter from you, and, as I never saw your writing, knew that the sloop was yours, and that you intended to stop on your way back, I suspected no treachery."

"Read the letter."

Mark seized the letter and read aloud:

"ON BOARD PACKET SLOOP SEA-CAT.

"TO MAJOR GARDINER, COMMANDING FORT:—

"DEAR SIR:—I am unable to visit you in person, so beg that you turn the Shark, the pirate prize, over to the bearer, who will give receipt for me."

"I have a crew with me to take her to Boston, whither I am now bound."

"With esteem, and thanking you for your kindness, for by the aid of your troops alone I captured the schooner,

"I am, your obedient servant,

"MARK MONTAGUE,

"Midshipman."

"N. B.—I will see that the officers and men who aided me get their full share of prize money."

"M. M."

"Well, Midshipman Montague, what do you think of that?"

"No one could suspect it, sir, of being other than genuine."

"So I think, and upon it I gave orders to the marine officer to turn the schooner over to you, and the prisoners are on board, as you know."

"That Caspar has done a great thing, sir."

"He has, indeed."

"But I will get back my sloop and the schooner."

"How can you?"

"There is no vessel-of-war in port?"

"None."

"And to go on to Boston would be to lose the captured vessels."

"So I should think."

"Do you know of a small merchant craft in port that is a fast sailer?"

"Yes, there is a brig here, as trim as a yacht, and she is to be bought by the Government for a cruiser, though her owner still holds her at a price too high."

"Where is she, sir?"

"Anchored up the harbor."

"Can I get her for a short cruise?"

"I could levy on her under the circumstances, Montague."

"Will you give me artillerists for two guns, and the guns I wish to borrow, along with some marines?"

"Gladly. I will be only too happy to serve you."

"Then, sir, please let us go at once after the brig."

The major gave his orders to get two pieces of light artillery ready to ship on the brig, and the men to man them.

Then he ordered forty marines out ready for the cruise, and away he hastened with Mark after the owner of the brig, while Chips drove the tired horses to the stable.

The brig's owner was found and readily granted permission for Mark to take her, when he heard all, while he told him where he could pick up a dozen men to sail her.

An hour only, so well did Mark work, was it before the brig was lying off the fort taking on board the two cannon and the soldiers.

When at last she ran out of the harbor under full sail, the sloop and the schooner were but mere specks on the sea, and heading down the coast, two leagues off-shore.

Night was coming on, and they would soon disappear from sight, but this fact did not seem to trouble Mark much, as he entered the cabin of the brig with a confident smile upon his face.

In the cabin sat a man whose face was pale and haggard, as though from suffering.

It was one of Captain Caspar's pirate crew, who had been wounded and taken ashore with other wounded shipmates, where they could be under the care of the fort surgeon.

"My man, I wish to have a talk with you," said Mark, and he added, significantly:

"I had you brought on board from the fort to see how much you value your life."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CAPTIVE.

IN spite of his great hurry to get off in the brig in chase of the sloop and schooner, Mark Montague had his wits about him.

Should the pirates see him in chase, he knew that they could readily hide from him along the coast, especially as night was coming on.

Then, too, he well knew the speed of both the sloop and Shark, and he feared that the brig might prove to be no match for them.

"Are there not some of the pirates at the fort who were wounded, Major Gardiner?" he asked.

"Yes, a dozen, several seriously wounded."

"I would like to borrow one who is least seriously wounded, sir."

"What for?"

"I think I can make good use of him in a way I have not the time to explain now, Major Gardiner."

"Take any one you please, and all, if you wish, for they belong to you, Montague," laughed the major.

"No, sir, one will do," and Mark went into the fort prison and picked out his man, while Chips escorted him to the brig's cabin and stood guard over him.

Then Mark asked the major to write to the commodore, at Boston, telling all that had occurred, and the brig set sail.

When the Royal Middy entered the brig's cabin, Chips was carefully guarding the prisoner, whose wound had not been as serious as was supposed at first by the surgeon.

"My man, you know this coast pretty well, I believe?" said Mark, fixing his piercing eyes upon the man.

"I know it."

"How long have you been under the command of Captain Caspar?"

"Two years," was the sullen reply.

"Do you know where I am taking you now?"

"No."

The prisoner was not aware that Captain Caspar had recaptured his vessel, and Mark did not intend to let him know it.

"You know what the fate of a pirate is!"

"I am no pirate."

"What are you?"

"I break the law only as a smuggler."

"You will be hanged as a pirate, for Captain Caspar gave up smuggling a year ago to turn pirate, or he is both smuggler and pirate, and you will suffer at the yard-arm for your crimes."

The man's face was livid now, and Mark continued:

"Now, I selected you from among your mates, as I rather liked your face, felt sorry for you, and do not care to see you hanged."

"But it rests with you as to whether you will be hanged up to the yard-arm or not."

"Rests with me?" cried the pirate, eagerly.

"Yes, with you."

"What control have I over my life?"

"You know where Captain Caspar has his retreat on the coast?"

"Well?"

"You can pilot this vessel there."

"It will do no good."

"Why?"

"He is dead."

"Did you see him killed?"

"Oh, no, but when your hot fire came he was standing upon the bulwarks, and he must have been shot and fallen into the sea, for how else could he have gotten away?"

"Might he not have swum ashore?"

"I think we were too far off for a man to attempt it."

"And so you deem him dead?"

"Yes."

"Well, pilot this brig to his retreat and I will give you your pardon."

"I cannot do so."

"Why not?"

"I do not care to betray the few men who are there."

"You seem to be a good fellow yourself, and I promise you a pardon, which I will get for you on our arrival in Boston; yes, and I'll give you a berth as a seaman, if you will pilot the brig to the rendezvous of Captain Caspar."

"I thank you, Master Montague, but I do not care to betray my mates, so must refuse."

"You are determined?"

"Yes."

"Well, my man, you will see that I can be determined too."

"I have told you what I would do, if you served me, and you refuse."

"Now I will tell you what I will do if you do not act as my pilot."

"Well, sir?"

"I will hang you to the yard-arm of this brig within the hour."

The man started, glanced into the face of the youth and saw only resolve there to carry out his threat.

Neither spoke for some moments, and then the captive pirate said:

"This is a sad fate, sir, because I will not betray my mates."

"It is a fate you deserve for your crimes, and because you refuse to accept your life on my terms I will be merciless."

"Now, decide."

"Well, Master Montague, life is dear to me."

"It is to us all."

"The captain has been my friend, sir, and I would die before I betrayed him."

"But I believe he is dead, and hence cannot be at the retreat."

"The men there are nothing to me more than others are, and I will save my life and gain my freedom on your terms."

"You decide wisely."

"And I will take the pardon you offer to get me, sir, and begin life anew, in the berth you say I may have."

"Well said, and it shall be yours when you are willing to take it after having done your duty, as I demand of you."

"Now, make yourself contented here in the cabin, until I am ready for your services as guide, only tell me to what point I shall lay my course."

The pirate gave the desired information, and Mark left him alone in the cabin, relieving Chips from his duty as guard.

When the dawn broke the sloop and schooner were nowhere to be seen but then the Royal Middy had ordered the brig under shortened sail, as he found her to be a good sailor, not wishing to be sighted by the pirates in the morning.

He was sure that Captain Caspar would head directly for his rendezvous to hide until his daring capture of the sloop and schooner had blown over, and so securely had he always concealed himself from being run to earth, that he would feel safe in his retreat and expect no pursuit.

In this the Royal Middy hoped to disappoint him, and he was careful not to let the captive know that he was in chase of the Corsair, or he would surely refuse to act as pilot.

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE ROYAL MIDDY.

It was night when the brig headed in toward the rugged coast, at the point where the captive pirate had told the Royal Middy to head for.

The soldiers seemed rather pleased with their cruise, as a break from the monotony of fort life, and the crew of the brig, the half-score of seamen whom Mark had so hastily shipped, turned out to be a fair lot of sailors, and obeyed their youthful commander with alacrity.

They had heard of his exploits, for the fame of the Royal Middy, as he was called by many, was rapidly spreading along the coast.

The brig was within a mile of the land, when Mark sent Chips to the cabin to aid the captive on deck.

His wound was in the side, and he had bled freely, but the bullet had touched no vital spot, and he was recovering as rapidly as could be expected.

A chair was brought for him, and seated by the wheel, he gave his orders to the helmsman how to steer.

"This is a bad coast to run along without a pilot who knows it well, and has nerve," said the young lieutenant of marines to Mark, as they stood gazing upon the wild shores ahead of them, and which the brig was rapidly approaching.

"That man has nerve, but what his skill is I do not know," replied Mark.

Soon the pirate pilot gave orders for the sail to be shortened, and to have just enough canvas set to control the vessel with.

"That man knows what he is about," said Mark, as the brig passed in between two rocky islands, and glided around a mass of reefs piled high in air not half a cable's length from her side.

It was indeed a wild-looking place for a vessel's keel to venture, and the seamen, who knew well the danger of a blow upon the bottom of a ship, held their breath in suspense.

But the pirate pilot seemed unmoved, and leaning over the starboard bulwark, for he had risen from his chair, he gave his orders in a low, calm voice that showed confidence in himself.

"Do you know, Master Montague, it was your luck that caused you to select me?" asked the pilot, as they were running close alongside of a huge island of rocks.

"Why so?"

"Besides the captain I am the only one who can run a vessel in here by night."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir, though several can bring small boats in by daylight."

"I was fortunate in selecting you from among your followers then; but I never thought of that when I did so, as I was governed by another motive."

"And may I ask what that was, sir?"

"Your face, for you looked to me like an honest man."

"Looks often deceive, sir, as in my case; but I had much to make an outlaw of me."

"Still, I will be one no longer."

"See here, sir, we have to pass through this island, which is split in two, but there is water enough, and then we run into the Lost Souls Harbor, as the captain calls his retreat," and the man laughed lightly.

The island was passed through, with little space to spare on either side, and then the rugged mainland loomed up ahead.

Five minutes more and the brig rounded a point of land, and then glided very slowly, for the wind hardly reached her sails there, in that secluded haven, into the little cove where the reader first beheld the Shark at anchor.

It was starlight, and, dimly revealed, the outlines of two vessels were visible.

As the brig was about at a standstill, two boats were lowered noiselessly, and into each went a score of marines, while the gunners remained on board to fire on the sloop and schooner if need be, for the Shark and Sea-Cat were recognized by all lying but a cable's length apart.

"Oh, Master Montague, what does this mean?" cried the pirate, pointing to the two vessels.

"It means, my man, that Captain Caspar was not dead as you supposed, but swam ashore the night we captured his schooner, and he got a crew somewhere, boarded my sloop on her way out of the river, and in her sailed to Portland, and pretending to come from me, got possession of his schooner.

"With the Sea-Cat and the Shark we sailed for his retreat here, and I have, with your aid, run him down."

"If I had known it, sir, that he was here, I would never have been your pilot."

"I would have died first."

"I feel that; but you need have no regret, my man, for you have done your duty and won your own life."

"Oh, sir, let no one of my mates, and above all the captain, know that I was the traitor."

"I thought that you would find here only a little booty, and that your coming would alarm the few who were here, so that they could escape, for they would be up in the cavern and surely know of your coming."

"Oh, sir, at heart I am no traitor, and I beg that no one of my mates shall so believe me."

"They shall not, and you can go into my cabin, where no one will see you."

So saying, Mark went over the side into the boat, and the order was given to pull for the schooner.

The oars were muffled, and the other boat, under the marine officer, headed for the sloop.

Not until they were alongside did the sleeping pirates on the Shark and the Sea-Cat suspect the presence of a foe.

Then they came rushing to the deck in alarm.

A short, sharp hand-to-hand fight followed; but the pirates were overpowered and put in irons, and the victory was won by the Royal Middy and his men.

But search for the Corsair Captain proved that he was nowhere to be found.

Among the dead and wounded on both decks he was not to be seen, nor was he a prisoner.

Then Mark remembered what the pirate pilot had said about the cavern retreat, and a prisoner was quickly forced to tell the secret of how to reach there.

The schooner was hauled alongside of the rocky shelf and a gang-plank hauled up into the rigging and laid across.

But the cabin was deserted, though upon the floor were two beds, lately occupied, and here had been sleeping Captain Caspar and Carl Dent.

Aroused from their slumbers by the shouts of the combatants and the firing, they had gazed down into the little harbor, beheld the brig, supposed it to be a vessel-of-war, and knew that all was lost.

"Come with me, Dent, for we must not stay here now."

"Curses upon the man who brought that vessel in here!"

"We are again fugitives, Dent, but we will not go without food and raiment this time and I have fortunately some gold with me."

"Come, we will be off, for we can save ourselves, though my poor men must suffer."

"Come!"

So saying, Captain Caspar and Carl Dent, grasping hurriedly what things they could carry with them, hastened back through the cavern out into the thicket, and once more became fugitives.

Thus it was that Mark Montague found the cave empty—no, not empty, for it was full of valuable booty, awaiting shipment to the seaport agents of the bold Corsair of the coast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

SAILING away from the Lost Souls Harbor, with the pirate pilot again at the wheel, Mark Montague headed for Portland, where here turned the brig to her owner and the soldiers to the fort.

Then he kept the crew that had served him so well on the brig, and with the Shark and the Sea-Cat headed for Boston.

Buntline was again in command of the sloop, he, Charcoal and the others of his crew, happy over their release and the getting back of their little vessel.

On board the Shark were the prisoners, down in the hold in irons, and Mark was in command, while the pilot was his companion in the cabin.

After a quick run the two pretty vessels ran into Boston Harbor, and the welcome that was given the Royal Middy made his heart beat with pride.

As he had proven himself so well capable of commanding, the commodore turned the Shark into a cruiser, and placed her under the command of the Royal Middy, who was to make of her a coast guard.

And right well did Mark Montague perform the work that was given him to do, his daring deeds becoming known along the entire American Coast, and outlaws learning to dread the very name of Montague the Royal Middy.

THE END.

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